Want to Make Me Happy? Tell Me about Your Experiences but Not Your Objects

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ABSTRACT

Evidence indicates that experiences bring greater benefits to consumers than objects. Extending this research beyond the actual purchaser, this work examines individuals who experience the purchase only indirectly via a conversation—listeners. It explores how conversations about experiential versus material purchases affect listeners socially and emotionally. Results show that hearing about others' experiences (vs. objects) advances listeners' happiness more. This finding shows that the scope of experiential purchases' advantage is wider than previously known. Further, this work identifies a sequential mechanism: Conversations about experiences (vs. objects) are more substantive, allowing listeners to build stronger social connections with tellers and, in turn, gain more happiness from the interaction. Critically, this mechanism explains the effect above and beyond a previously-advanced mechanism via perceived motivation (Van Boven, Campbell, and Gilovich 2010). Additionally, this work identifies a boundary of the model: purchase valence. Theoretical and practical implications for managers, consumers, and policymakers are discussed.

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Talking and listening are critical elements of the social enterprise (Argo, White, and Dahl 2006; Berger and Schwartz 2011; Derlega et al. 1993; Mehl et al. 2010). The importance of talking and listening are underscored by evidence that engaging in social interaction via conversation is strongly associated with happiness (Mehl et al. 2010)—the "best, noblest, and most pleasant thing in the world" (Aristotle. Nichomachean Ethics 2001).

Given these findings, it is perhaps not surprising that, on average, people spend eight and a quarter hours per day conversing with others about a myriad of topics (Mehl and Pennebaker 2003; Mehl, Gosling, and Pennebaker 2006). Of special relevance to the present work, a sizable portion of these conversations take the form of word-of-mouth (WOM) about material objects or consumption experiences (Carl 2006; Keller and Libai 2009). Some estimates suggest that people spend approximately 7% of their total conversation time—or nearly 40 minutes per day—simply listening to others share about such purchases (Carl 2006; Keller and Libai 2009). The present work focuses on this phenomenon and investigates how hearing others talk about their experiences versus objects affects the listener's own happiness—the first objective of this work.

From a marketing perspective, consumer listening is a unique occurrence. In contrast to the actual purchaser who directly buys and consumes the experience or object, the listener experiences the purchase only *indirectly*, via the conversation. Therefore, this investigation, centered on the listener, extends prior research on experiential versus material purchases (e.g., Bastos, 2019a, 2019b, 2020a, 2020b; Bastos and Brucks 2017; Carter and Gilovich 2010, 2012; Rosenzweig and Gilovich 2012; Van Boven and Gilovich 2003), which has focused primarily on the purchaser as a direct beneficiary of the "experience recommendation" (Nicolao, Irwin, and Goodman 2009)—the idea that experiential purchases advance happiness more than do material purchases (Van Boven and Gilovich 2003). This work proposes and shows that this experiential

advantage goes beyond the purchaser and manifest also in those who have only indirect exposure to the purchase via listening to a purchase-related conversation. By doing so, this work is the first to show that the greater ability of experiences to advance happiness manifests even without direct consumption of the purchase—a new perspective to the experiential advantage.

Naturally, interpersonal conversations unfold when people enact the behaviors of telling and listening in a social interaction. Whereas people normally enact both roles in a given interaction, for the purposes of empirical research, claims about a specific role—i.e., the teller or the listener—can best be made when the two are distinguished and each participant enacts only one of them. In the domain of experiential versus material purchases, past research has made important strides in advancing knowledge on how conversations about these two purchase types lead to different outcomes. However, differently from the present work, that research has either distinguished the two roles and focused exclusively on the teller (Bastos and Brucks 2017; Carter and Gilovich 2015) or not separated them and instead have each participant enact both in the same conversation interaction (Van Boven, Campbell, and Gilovich 2010, Study 5). In the latter case, Van Boven, Campbell, and Gilovich (2010) found that people form more positive perceptions of a conversation partner and consequently enjoy the conversation more when the interaction revolved around experiences that each person had had than objects that each had owned. Although these are insightful findings, conflating the two roles makes it unclear where the effects came from. There are at least three possibilities: First, the more favorable outcomes of experiential versus material conversations could have come, solely, from the behavior of telling, from that of listening, or from both—telling and listening. In light of the benefits of focusing on a specific conversation role, the present research disentangles the role of the teller from that of

the listener and focuses exclusively on the latter. In doing so, it adds precision to the understanding of the listener's role in purchase-related conversations.

In addition, this investigation has a second objective: to identify the mechanism responsible for the predicted effect. Drawing on research in interpersonal relationships and happiness, it theorizes for and tests a unique, two-step sequential mechanism via conversation substantiveness and social connection. The data show that conversations about experiences versus objects are more substantive (i.e., meaningful and involving), enabling listeners to build stronger social connections with tellers and, in turn, gain more happiness from the interaction.

The findings associated with the underlying process add to previous research in several ways: First, besides revealing the unique mechanism via conversation substantiveness and social connection, this examination shows that this mechanism explains the effect above and beyond another process previously advanced in the literature. Specifically, complimenting Van Boven, Campbell, and Gilovich's (2010) finding that the perceptions that conversation partners form of *each other*—how extrinsically versus intrinsically motivated they perceive the partner to be—determine how much they like the other person, the present work shows that the impression that listeners form of the *conversation*—how substantive they perceive the conversation to be—also determines how connected they (the listeners) feel to the teller and, subsequently, the level of happiness those listeners gain from the conversation. Of note, each of these mechanisms explains a proportion of the effect above and beyond that explained by the other.

It is worth noting that, besides accounting for different proportions of the effect, the two mechanisms also differ in a way that is consequential to consumers. Specifically, the two attributes forming them—i.e., perceived motivation and conversation substantiveness—are linked to different entities—i.e., the person and the conversation, respectively. This is significant

because, whereas it is difficult and perhaps unfruitful to try to change a conversation partner into being less materialistic and more experience-focused, the content of a conversation can readily be shaped in ways to make the interaction more substantive. Indeed, the present work presents a feasible way to do so, based on whether the conversation focuses on the experiential (vs. material) aspects of the same purchase—this work has consequential and applicable implications.

By showing that conversation substantiveness determines social connection, the present work contributes to current knowledge in an additional way. Research following Van Boven and Gilovich's (2003) seminal work has shown that, compared to objects, experiences have a strong capacity to create social relationships. Extant evidence indicates that experiences (vs. objects) enable the purchaser to feel more connected to people who consume the purchase with them (Caprariello and Reis 2013) as well as to other consumers who made the same purchase and to other human beings in general (Kumar et al. 2014). A common thread across these works is the focus on how experiences connect the *purchaser to others*. Except for Chan and Mogilner (2017) investigation in the gift giving domain, no other work thus far has examined social connection in the opposite direction: the connection of *others to purchasers*. The present work contributes to this nascent stream of research by showing how another group of individuals—the listener in purchase-related conversations—connects to the purchaser. However, the present work is distinct also from Chan and Mogilner (2017) in a notable way, briefly mentioned above. Whereas gift recipients are similar to purchasers in that both experience and consume the purchase directly, the listener experiences the purchase only indirectly via the conversation.

Further, this work examines a potential boundary condition of the model: purchase valence. Drawing on past findings, it proposes and empirically tests the idea that conversations about negative experiences and negative objects are likely to be experienced by the listener as

equally substantive, thus similarly bonding, and equally able to advance listener happiness. Existing theory supports this idea: Whereas past work indicates that experiences (vs. objects) carry more information about the teller's self (Carter and Gilovich 2012), which should make the conversation more meaningful and substantive, research also informs that when purchases turn out negatively people refrain from associating the self with such purchases. Further, extant evidence suggests that when experiential and material purchases turn out negatively, the purchaser (i.e., teller) gains similarly low levels of happiness from both (Nicolao, Irwin, and Goodman 2009). As a result, conversations about experiential and material purchases that turned out unfavorably are likely to lack the greater positivity characteristic of experiential (vs. material) conversations. In addition, hearing about a person's misfortune can be cognitively and emotionally demanding (Pennebacker 1993), leading the listener to psychologically withdraw from the interaction, thus attenuating the substantiveness of conversations about experiences and objects. Consistent with this work's prediction, the findings indicate that the model holds for positive but not negative purchases. This finding adds to current knowledge in the following way: Past research has shown that purchase valence moderates the mechanism via psychological adaptation, a mechanism that explains the greater happiness that purchasers gain from experiences versus objects (Nicolao, Irwin, and Goodman 2009) and the mechanism via uniqueness, a mechanism that explains consumers' greater willingness to accept a price increase for experiences than objects (Bastos 2019). Adding to body of research, the present work shows that purchase valence moderates a novel mechanism, via substantiveness and social connection, a mechanism that sequentially explains the greater happiness that listeners obtain from experiential (vs. material) conversations. Purchase valence is especially relevant in the context of the present investigation given how often consumers converse about their purchases that turned out

negatively (Anderson 1998; Diener and Greyser 1978). It is informative to know that while sharing about one's negative purchases may serve to alleviate the purchasers' frustration (Sundaram, Mitra, and Webster 1998), it does little to bring a conversation partner closer to the dissatisfied purchaser and to advance the partner's happiness.

The next section elaborates on the conceptual foundation leading up to the hypotheses. Then, three studies test and support the framework empirically. In closing, this work discusses contributions and avenues for future investigations.

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

This section presents the theoretical rationale behind the predictions that experiential conversations advance more listener happiness than do material conversations; and that they do so via enhancing conversation substantiveness and social connection. First, the section presents literature supporting the proposition that experiential conversations are more substantive than material conversations. Second, it discusses research backing the notion that substantive conversations forge stronger social connections between listeners and tellers. Finally, it reviews work supporting the idea that, as a result of feeling more socially connected to tellers, experiential listeners derive more happiness from the interaction than do material listeners.

Conversation Topic & Conversation Substantiveness

Following Mehl et al.'s (2010, 539) definition, this manuscript conceptualizes a substantive conversation as "an involved conversation" where "meaningful information [is] exchanged." Past research suggests that there may be more meaningful and involving substance in conversations about experiences than in those about objects. First, experiential purchases are closer to and more representative of the purchaser's self (Carter and Gilovich 2012). Accordingly, conversations about experiences are likely to carry more personal information

about the teller than conversations about objects. Because self-disclosure adds to the depth and meaningfulness of a conversation (Altman and Taylor 1973), experiential conversations are likely to be perceived by the listener as more substantive than material conversations. Further, because experiential purchases are superior in advancing the happiness of the purchaser (i.e., the teller; Bastos and Brucks 2017; Van Boven and Gilovich 2003), conversations about experiences are likely to reflect this positivity and thus feel more meaningful and involving to the listener. Finally, experiences "have a typical narrative structure with a beginning, middle, and end" (Van Boven and Gilovich 2003, 1200), making them particularly suitable for storytelling (Kumar and Gilovich 2015), an involving form of conversation (Denning 2006).

Together, these findings support the prediction that conversations about experiential purchases are likely to be more substantive than those about material purchases. Prior work also suggests that substantive conversations are likely to facilitate social connection; discussed next.

Conversation Substantiveness & Social Connection

This work defines social connection as "a person's subjective sense of having close and positively experienced relationships with others in the social world" (Seppala, Rossomando, and Doty 2013, 412). Sharing substantive information is a critical component in the formation and development of relationships (Aron et al. 1997; Derlega et al. 1993; Jourard 1971); indeed, a meta-analysis shows that people who share deep information are liked more than those who share at superficial levels (Collins and Miller 1994). Echoing this finding, researchers have claimed that social connections strengthen when a person shares meaningful information with another (Reis and Shaver 1988), and that sharing news of success is the number-one rule of friendship (Argyle and Henderson 1984). These perspectives are consistent with Social Penetration Theory, which holds that interpersonal relationships develop as individuals share

continuously more meaningful information (Altman and Taylor 1973). Following this reasoning, purchase-related conversations that are more substantive (i.e., those about experiences) should be especially conducive to social connection. Socially bonding with the teller should, in turn, positively affect the listener's happiness. The next section turns to this notion.

Social Connection & Listener Happiness

A great deal of research has examined the relationship between social variables and happiness. Researchers have tested how happiness is affected by, for example, the quality of interpersonal relationships (Diener and Seligman 2002) and participation in social events (Argyle and Lu 1990). This literature informs that connecting with others is of the utmost importance for happiness (Baumeister and Leary 1995). Indeed, social connectedness is one of the strongest correlates of well-being (Bradburn 1969), and intimacy—i.e., close, communicative, and warm interactions with others—is associated with greater happiness in life (McAdams and Bryant 1987). Echoing these notions, Diener and Seligman (2002) conclude that healthy social relationships is the one element without which happiness cannot flourish. In short, social relationships are not simply an optional ingredient for happiness—they are an indispensable one. Therefore, in a purchase-related conversation, the level of social connection developed with the teller should affect the listener's own happiness. Put formally, this work hypothesizes that:

Hypothesis 1: Listeners will gain more happiness from purchase-related conversations when the interaction revolves around an experiential than a material purchase.

Hypothesis 2: The greater substantiveness of and the stronger social connections formed in experiential (vs. material) conversations will sequentially mediate this effect.

[Insert Figure 1 about Here]

OVERVIEW OF STUDIES

Three studies test the predicted model. Study 1 engages participants in the actual behavior of listening to another person share about an experiential or a material purchase. Using this high-realism approach, it tests part of the model by examining whether stronger social connections are formed in experiential (vs. material) conversations and whether this leads to greater listener happiness. Next, building on Study 1, Study 2 employs a virtual, computer-mediated conversation to test the full two-step mediation, where conversation topic is posited to increase listener happiness via conversation substantiveness and social connection. Using a framing approach, Study 2 keeps the focal purchase constant (i.e., a BBQ grill) and manipulates only the way it is presented to listeners: as an experience or an object. Last, Study 3 tests a boundary of the model: purchase valence.

Together, findings across these three studies support the following conclusion: Conversations about experiential (vs. material) purchases are more substantive, facilitating social connection, and consequently advancing listener happiness more; an effect that unfolds for conversations about positive but not negative purchases.

Study 1

Study 1 examines whether experiential conversations engender stronger social connections than material conversations and, as a result, experiential listeners gain more happiness from the conversation than do material listeners. Participants engaged in an actual conversation with another individual who shared about an experience or an object.

Procedures

Study 1 randomly assigned seventy-four undergraduate students from an American public university to the role of either teller or listener (females = 32%, M_{age} = 21.55, SD = 2.89). Tellers and listeners were initially taken to two separate conference rooms. In the first room, tellers were

given a paper questionnaire asking them to recall and write about an experiential or a material purchase they had made. The questionnaire also described the upcoming conversation activity with another participant, and asked tellers to share about their purchase with this participant as they normally would with a friend. Simultaneously, in the second room, listeners were verbally informed and instructed about the upcoming conversation activity, and were asked to listen and behave as they would in a regular interaction with a friend.

Next, tellers and listeners rejoined and formed pairs of one teller and one listener (pairs were the same gender, when possible). Then, each pair went into an individual room. Before starting the conversation, all pairs engaged in a two-minute ice-breaking activity intended to get participants familiar with each other and acclimated with the idea of conversing. For this ice-breaking activity, participants were asked to "introduce yourselves, and tell the other person your major and something interesting about you." After the two minutes were up, a sound signal indicated the end of the ice-breaking activity and the beginning of the purchase conversation.

When the pair finished conversing, participants sent a pre-arranged email to the experimenter who was in a room nearby. The experimenter entered the room and instructed tellers and listeners to return to their respective initial conference rooms where they completed their respective questionnaires. Given this investigation's focus on the listener, the analyses below are exclusive to the listener's data. Using 7-point scales (1 = *Not at all*; 7 = *Very much*), listeners reported on social connection ("How much did you like the other participant?"; "How likely is it that you could be friends with this person?"; $r = .81$) and happiness ("How much happiness did you draw from listening about that purchase?"). Conversation substantiveness was not measured in this study. Listeners also completed the 7-item version of the Material Values Scale (MVS; Richins 2004) as a potential qualifying factor.

Results

Listener happiness. An ANOVA with conversation topic (experiential vs. material purchase) predicting listener happiness indicated that experiential listeners derived significantly greater happiness from the conversation (M = 4.65, SD = 1.66) than did material listeners (M = 3.59, SD = 1.41; $F(1, 35) = 4.28$, $p = .04$, Cohen's $d = 0.69$).

Mediation. A bootstrapping analysis of mediation (PROCESS, model 4; Hayes 2013) with 10,000 resamples (the number of resamples used in all mediation analyses) tested whether social connection mediated the effect of conversation topic on listener happiness. Results showed a marginally significant effect of conversation topic (0 = object; 1 = experience) on social connection ($b = 0.84$, $SE = 0.43$, $t(35) = 1.95$, $p = .058$). When both conversation topic and social connection were in the model, social connection positively and significantly predicted happiness ($b = 0.76$, $SE = 0.15$, $t(34) = 4.91$, $p < .001$), whereas the effect of conversation topic was reduced to non-significant ($b = 0.41$, $SE = 0.41$, $t(34) = 0.98$, $p = .33$). In line with these results, the indirect effect of conversation topic on listener happiness via social connection was significant ($b = 0.64$, $SE = 0.31$, 95% CI = [0.07, 1.33]).

Additional analyses. Materialism (as measured by the MVS), age, and gender did not differ across conditions nor did they qualify the direct effect of conversation topic on listener happiness (ps > .1) or its indirect effect via social connection.

Discussion

When hearing other people talk about their purchases, listeners build social connections with these individuals, which positively influences their own happiness. Using real conversations, Study 1 confirms the prediction that this happiness effect is stronger when the conversation revolves around experiences versus objects. Plus, results show that social

connection mediates this effect. Finally, Study 1 rules out materialism, age, and gender as potential qualifying factors. Of note, this study is different from those reported in the literature in that it is the first to separate the teller and listener roles and show the benefits of listening, alone.

A strength of Study 1 is its inclusion of an array of different purchases, which enables it to demonstrate that the effect is not limited to a specific example of purchase. On the other hand, because the tellers were free to select the experience or object that was shared, one could argue that Study 1 compared purchases that are, in fact, incompatible (e.g., movies vs. shoes). A better approach would keep the purchase constant. That is, it would be informative to examine whether the effects replicate when the purchase is kept to one particular purchase and the only variation is whether it is presented to listeners as an experiential or a material purchase. Because the physical nature of some purchases is a given, changing the actual purchase is unrealistic. Hence, this work examines an alternative based on a framing approach that tellers could readily employ to increase the substantiveness and social bonding potential of material conversations, which should have a positive downstream effect on listener happiness. Further, Study 1's relatively small sample size may render the findings inconclusive (Simonsohn 2015). Also, the measures of social connection and listener happiness were comprised of two- and one-item scales, respectively (Churchill 1979). This is a concern because, for example, the social connection measure may have captured only certain aspects of the construct—liking for and likelihood of continuous relationship with the other person—, whereas a multi-item measure may be able to capture the construct more fully. Also importantly, Study 1 only tested part of the sequential mediation model. Study 2 was designed to address all these limitations.

Study 2

Using a framing approach, Study 2 keeps the focal purchase constant (i.e., a BBQ grill) and manipulates whether the purchase is presented to participants as an experience or an object (Bastos 2019; Bastos and Brucks 2017; Carter and Gilovich 2010, 2012; Rosenzweig and Gilovich 2012). This approach neutralize idiosyncrasies between the experiential and material purchases discussed in Study 1. Further, Study 2 uses a substantially larger sample and utilizes improved measures to test the two-step mediation model in its entirety. Lastly, and critically, this study assesses a variable known to influence social bonding in purchase-related conversations—perceived motivation (Van Boven, Campbell, and Gilovich 2010). It does so to test whether substantiveness provides explaining power above and beyond what is already known.

Procedures

Four hundred and two participants from Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk; females = 57%, M_{age} = 35.91, SD = 11.10)[1] completed this between-subjects study for financial compensation. First, participants were told that the researchers were interested in learning about interpersonal conversation in an online context, and that they would be testing out a chat platform with another Mturk participant. They read that their conversation partner had been given a topic to tell them about and that they would converse with and respond to that person by selecting sentences or questions generated by the chat platform. They were then asked to click 'next' to connect to their partner. In reality, participants (i.e., listeners) did not have a conversation partner (i.e., a teller), instead, the questionnaire was designed so that participants received pre-programmed replies from their "partner" that fit the sentence/question they (participants) had chosen to send. For realism sake, during the interaction, there were timed

[1] The study was available only to participants with IP addresses from the United States, and required a history of approval rate equal to or above 95% with a minimum of 100 tasks previously approved (these criteria were used in all the studies involving Mturk).

pauses between answers—as if the teller were writing his/her responses—, and a typing error included in the teller's responses—as to represent typographical errors common in this form of conversation.

Following a 3-second wait to be connected with the teller, participants first engaged in basic introductions (e.g., "Hi! How is your day going?"). Participants then selected and sent one of two questions about the topic that their partner was to tell them about (e.g., "The researchers told me that you were going to tell me about a certain topic? What's that?"). At this point, the online questionnaire randomly assigned participants to the experiential or material condition. Those in the experiential (vs. material) condition received the reply message focusing on the experiential (vs. material) aspects of the BBQ grill: "Yes, that's right. They asked me to tell you about a time when I spent money, basically, to have an experience (object). I can tell you about one purchase I clearly remember. This happened about 7 months ago. I got a BBQ grill called BBQ X. You know, in my mind a grill is really about having a nice experience (object) at home. I've enjoyed using (owning) it a lot. What a cool experience (object)! I could tell you the details of that BBQ experience (object), but I guess you can imagine it, right?"

Participants then engaged in one more exchange with the teller. After asking the teller to say more about the BBQ (e.g., "I see. Can you tell me more about it?"), those in the experiential (vs. material) condition received the message: "Definitely! This grill gives me some of the best (is one of the best) outdoor experiences (objects) I have ever had. It's just the type of thing that you're glad to experience (own), you know? It's all about having good moments (features) around the grill. That's what matters, isn't it? Anyway, I like it a lot. I have lots of great moments with it (It has a lot of great features). If you are looking for a great experience in the outdoors (a great object for the outdoors), I definitely recommend a grill like this. It's a

wonderful experience to have (object to own)!" (please see Web Appendix A for the complete manipulation texts for this and Study 3). Next, participants ended the conversation by sending the message, "Got it. Thanks for telling me about it. I wish you a good day."

The questionnaire then informed participants that the interaction was over and that they were no longer connected with the other person. To prevent suspicion that the other person could observe their answers to the upcoming questions, the questionnaire assured participants that "Your answers are anonymous and only the researchers will see them at a later time." Next, participants answered a two-item measure of substantiveness designed based Mehl et al.'s (2010, 539) definition of the construct ("The topic that the other person told me was involving"; "The other person told me meaningful information"; $r = .76$, $p < .001$), and extended measures of social connection and happiness. Social connection included the two items from Study 1 plus three new items ("How close did you feel to this person?"; "I felt 'in sync' with that person"; "I would want to talk again with this person about his/her experience/object"; $\alpha = .93$). These items used 7-point scales anchored "*Not at all*" to "*Very Much*" or "*Strongly Disagree*" to "*Strongly Agree*", as appropriate. The listener happiness measure was comprised of four items ("When you think about that experience/object, how happy does it make you?"; "How much happiness did you get from that conversation?"; "How much happiness did listening about that experience/object bring to you?"; "How much did learning about that experience/object contribute to your happiness?"; 1 = *Not at all*; 7 = *Very Much*; $\alpha = .94$). Further, to examine the current model in relation to previous research showing that perception of the purchaser (as intrinsically vs. extrinsically motivated) affects how strongly conversation partners bond (Van Boven, Campbell, and Gilovich 2010, Study 5), the questionnaire adopted the six-item measure used in that previous work to assess the listener's perception of the teller's motivation behind the

purchase. This additional examination aimed to explore the predictive ability of substantiveness as a determinant of social connection when perceived motivation was also in the model—i.e., how one mechanism performs when another is accounted for (Hayes 2017). There are three potential outcomes: When conversation substantiveness and perceived motivation are entered jointly in the model as predictors of social connection, it is possible that only one emerges as a predictor as it absorbs the effect exerted by the other, or each is responsible for a separate portion of the variance on social connection and both emerge as significant predictors (Hayes 2017). To measure perceived motivation, the questionnaire instructed participants to: "As you picture the person who told you about his/her BBQ experience (object), please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the statements that: The other person was trying… 1. … to be admired by other people; 2. … to look good or to appeal attractive to others; 3. … to obtain external rewards such as status that the BBQ would provide (these first three items focused on extrinsic motivation); 4. … to fulfill him/herself and have a meaningful life; 5. … to establish or maintain relationships with others; 6. … to obtain inherent enjoyment and stimulation that the BBQ would provide" (these next three items focused on intrinsic motivation). For analysis purposes, the three items for each motivation were averaged and, subsequently, the average for extrinsic motivation was subtracted from that of intrinsic motivation to create an overall measure of perceived motivation, where greater values are associated with greater intrinsic motives.

Last, participants completed a two-item measure serving as manipulation check ("The grill they described earlier is:"; 1 = *Definitely a material object*; 7 = *Definitely an experience*; "The grill is:"; 1 = *Something tangible that one can keep in his/her possession*; 7 = *Something that enables experiences*; $r = .83$, $p < .001$).

Results

Measurement model. The measurement model was designed to capture three separate factors forming the predicted model—conversation substantiveness, social connection, and listener happiness. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA; AMOS) tested whether the data fit this proposed three-factor model. Results yielded: $\chi^2(36) = 94.39$, $p < .001$, CMIN/DF = 2.62, RMSEA = .06, NNFI = .98, and CFI = .99, indicating that the measurement model was in line with established parameters of adequate model fit (Bagozzi and Yi 2012). Given the proper fit of the empirical three-factor model, the analyses considered these factors as separate constructs.

Next, using Fornell and Larcker's (1981) criteria, this work examined the convergent and discriminant validity of the measures capturing the three constructs. Supporting their convergent validity, the average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct was greater than .05, and the reliability for each was greater than their respective AVE; hence satisfying the two criteria of convergent validity. Next, supporting their discriminant validity, the maximum shared variance (MSV) and the average shared variance (ASV) for each construct were smaller than their respective AVE, and, importantly, the square root of AVE for each was greater than their inter-construct correlations (please see Web Appendix B for correlation matrix); thereby satisfying all the three criteria of discriminant validity (Table 1). [2]

[Insert Table 1 about Here]

Manipulation check. The framing manipulation worked as expected: experiential condition participants thought of the conversation as significantly more experiential ($M = 4.55$, $SD = 1.82$) than did material condition participants ($M = 3.00$, $SD = 1.99$; $F(1, 400) = 65.66$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.81$).

[2] For Study 3, to save space, the results for measurement model fit, and convergent and discriminant validity are reported in Web Appendix B. They are all at acceptable levels.

Listener happiness. Listeners gained significantly more happiness from conversations focusing on the experiential (M = 4.23, SD = 1.52) rather than the material properties of the grill (M = 3.71, SD = 1.65; $F(1, 400) = 10.50$, $p = .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.32$), supporting Hypothesis 1. [3]

Two-step sequential mediation. This analysis of sequential mediation treated conversation topic as the independent variable, conversation substantiveness as step 1 mediator, social connection as step 2 mediator, and listener happiness as the dependent variable. Besides conversation substantiveness, the analysis also included perceived motivation as a potential step 1 mediator. The analysis used PROCESS model 80 since this model allows for tests of sequential mediation of a framework containing two mediators in its first step (Hayes 2017).

The indirect effect of conversation topic on listener happiness was significant via both paths: 'conversation substantiveness → social connection' (two-step sequential mediation: β = 0.16, SE = 0.07, 95% CI = [0.02, 0.30]), supporting Hypothesis 2; and 'perceived motivation → social connection' (two-step sequential mediation: β = 0.05, SE = 0.01, 95% CI = [0.02, 0.09]), replicating Van Boven, Campbell, and Gilovich (2010). Results from a contrast analysis indicated that neither pathway transmitted a significantly greater proportion of the indirect effect (β = 0.10, SE = 0.07, 95% CI = [−0.03, 0.25]). Since the sequential mediation analysis performed here (i.e., PROCESS, model 80) considers the effect of each indirect path while controlling for the effect of the other, these findings suggest that each of the two step 1 mediators (i.e., conversation substantiveness and perceived motivation) makes a meaningful contribution to

[3] In addition, related to listener happiness specifically, as one additional check, the author removed one of the items from the listener happiness measure that could be interpreted as less related to the conversation (i.e., "When you think about that experience/object, how happy does it make you?") and reran the analyses on the direct and indirect effects. All results across Studies 2 and 3 remained the same (please see Web Appendix C for the reporting of those results).

explaining the effect on the outcome variable, above and beyond the variance explained by the other path.

Discussion

This study shows that listeners derive more happiness from a purchase-related conversation when the experiential aspects of the purchase take central stage than when its material aspects predominate. Further, and complementing Study 1, Study 2 tests the complete predicted mechanism and confirms that the difference in listener happiness is driven by listeners' perception that experiential (vs. material) conversations are more substantive, which makes these conversations especially conducive to social bonding. Of note, this mechanism via conversation substantiveness holds even after accounting for the variance transmitted by another known variable—perceived motivation (Van Boven, Campbell, and Gilovich 2010). This result is critical as it shows the additional informative value of the present model.

The framing approach employed in this study enables it to address concerns related to (in)compatibility of different experiential and material purchases and to rule out alternative explanations associated with potential peculiarities of experiences versus objects. Further, because it is readily applicable, this approach has practical implications, a topic this work elaborates on in the General Discussion.

Thus far, this investigation has relied on mediation approach for evidence that the effect is caused by the predicted sequential mechanism. Following the idea that "an argument for causality can best be made when various classes of evidence all converge on the same conclusion." (Lyubomirsky, King, and Diener 2005, 804), Study 3 seeks evidence of a different nature, based on moderation instead of mediation. Specifically, Study 3 manipulates a factor that,

as theorized below, should qualify the relations in the model: purchase valence. In this sense, Study 3 also tests a potential boundary condition.

Study 3

Study 3 manipulates purchase valence to test the model with a moderation approach (vs. mediation, Studies 1 and 2). Past research examining the actual purchaser finds that the experience advantage holds for purchases that turn out positively but not for those that turn out negatively (Nicolao, Irwin, and Goodman 2009). That is, Nicolao, Irwin, and Goodman (2009) demonstrate that consumers adapt more slowly to their experiences than to their objects, such that positive experiences keep their appeal for longer than do objects. On the other hand, the authors find that, when the purchases turn out negatively, experiences have no benefit over objects.

For a different reason—i.e., conversation substantiveness—, the present work predicts that purchase valence moderates the happiness effect for a different group—listeners. Specifically, this work posits that the superiority of experiential (vs. material) conversations in advancing listener happiness will manifest in interactions about positive but not those about negative purchases; and that this moderation effect will result from listeners perceiving greater substantiveness in experiential (vs. material) conversations only when it centers on purchases that turned out positively. When the purchases turned out negatively, conversations about experiences and objects will be seen as *equally* substantive. Below is the theoretical rationale for the equalization of substantiveness in conversations about negative purchases.

In everyday life, certain conversations about negative topics can be meaningful and involving—that is, substantive. For example, conversations among natural disaster survivors trying to make collective sense of and recover from the trauma (cognitive-processing theory;

Joseph, Murphy, and Regel 2012) are likely to be both meaningful and involving. In the more specific consumer domain, negative word-of-mouth often serves as an avenue to vent off one's anger and frustration, or to exert vengeance against the firm (Sundaram, Mitra, and Webster 1998). This work proposes that, from the listeners' perspective, these types of conversations feel low in meaningfulness and involvement.

As theorized earlier in this manuscript, a key reason why conversations about positive experiences (vs. objects) are more meaningful is that they carry more information about the teller as a person. However, in the case of negative purchases, self-enhancement theory (Fiske 2001; Sedikides 1993) suggests that someone sharing about a negative purchase would likely refrain from associating the self with that purchase. They would do so to avoid potential negative evaluations from others—as someone incapable of choosing and consuming the 'right' purchases. Indeed, research shows that people tend to share personal consumption experiences that are positive, but pass on others' consumption experiences that are negative (De Angelis et al. 2012). Similarly, evidence indicates that individuals who consider themselves experts in a particular product category are less likely to tell others about their unsuccessful purchases in that category (Wojnicki and Godes 2008).

Further, because tellers of negative experiences and negative objects are likely to have gained equivalently low levels of happiness from their purchases (Nicolao, Irwin, and Goodman 2009), conversations about those experiences are likely to lack the greater positivity characteristic of experiential (vs. material) conversations (Van Boven, Campbell, and Gilovich 2010). Therefore, to the listener, these conversations should feel similarly meaningful and involving.

In addition, whereas nonconsequential negative events can make for entertaining conversation (Arnould and Price 1993), hearing about someone else's misfortune can be cognitively and emotionally demanding (Pennebacker 1993). However, because social norms about conversation make it inappropriate for the listener to simply escape from such interactions (Christophe and Rimé 1997), listeners may instead attempt to withdraw psychologically (Schaafsma et al. 2015), making for a low involvement situation.

Following these perspectives, this work predicts that listeners will perceive conversations about negative experiences and negative objects as equally substantive. Based on the findings from Studies 1 and 2, this equalization effect on substantiveness should carry on to social connection and happiness; thus eliminating the experiential advantage of increasing listeners' happiness. In short, the relations in the model should replicate for conversations about positive purchases (as in Studies 1 and 2), but should neutralize for those about negative purchases.

Procedures

Three hundred and eighty-two MTurk participants completed the study for financial compensation (females = 63%, M_{age} = 37.12, SD = 12.11). The study employed a between-subjects design: 2 (conversation topic: experiential vs. material purchase) x 2 (purchase outcome: positive vs. negative). Participants were randomly assigned to imagine a conversation where they listened to someone share about experiential or material purchases that had turned out positively or negatively. To create a context for the hypothetical conversation, participants first read: "Imagine that you have recently joined a social organization of your choice. At one of this organization's gatherings, you meet another person and the two of you spend some time talking." Then, participants were told that the conversation focused on experiences or material objects that the other person had paid a certain amount of money to have. To manipulate purchase valence,

the study adapted Nicolao, Irwin, and Goodman's (2009) script (with the necessary modifications to fit this experiment's context). Participants in the positive purchase condition read, "The particular experiences/objects they share with you are ones that turned out well; they enjoyed these experiences/objects." Participants in the negative purchase condition read, "The particular experiences/objects they share with you are ones that did not turn out well; they did not enjoy these experiences/objects."

Participants were asked to think about what the conversation would be like and to describe it by filling in the blanks of provided sentences (Moore 2012). This procedure kept participants on task and reinforced the manipulations. Participants completed three sentences: "The experiences/objects the other person told me about were a(an) ____"; "To be more specific, when sharing details about their experiences/objects, they told me that the experiences/objects were ___"; "In telling me that the experiences/objects turned out well (did not turn out well) and that they had (not) enjoyed the experiences/objects, the other person said that ____."

Next, participants answered the same measures of substantiveness (r = .63), social connection (α = .94), and listener happiness (α = .95) from Study 2. Finally, they completed a two-item measure serving as manipulation check for purchase valence ("How did these experiences/objects turn out for that person?"; 1 = *Very Negatively*; 7 = *Very Positively*; "How much did this person enjoy the experiences/objects s/he told you about?"; 1 = *Not at all*; 7 = *Very much*; r = .95).

Results

Manipulation check. The purchase valence manipulation worked as expected: participants in the positive purchase condition reported that the purchase had turned out more favorably than participants in the negative purchase condition (M_{pos} = 6.50, SD = 0.98 vs. M_{neg} =

2.06, *SD* = 1.41; $F(1, 378) = 1233.61$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .76$). There was also a significant effect of conversation topic ($M_{exp} = 4.27$, *SD* = 2.54 vs. $M_{mat} = 3.96$, *SD* = 2.52; $F(1, 378) = 4.45$, $p = .03$, $\eta^2 = .01$) and a non-significant interaction ($F(1, 378) < 1$, $p = .99$, $\eta^2 < .001$).

Conversation substantiveness. An ANOVA with conversation topic and purchase valence as independent variables and conversation substantiveness as the dependent variable showed significant effects of conversation topic ($M_{exp} = 4.93$, *SD* = 1.32 vs. $M_{mat} = 4.41$, *SD* = 1.56; $F(1, 378) = 14.39$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .03$), purchase valence ($M_{pos} = 4.99$, *SD* = 1.38 vs. $M_{neg} = 4.43$, *SD* = 1.48; $F(1, 378) = 13.72$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .03$), and, more importantly, the predicted interaction of conversation topic by purchase valence ($F(1, 378) = 9.86$, $p = .002$, $\eta^2 = .02$). Replicating previous results, positive experiential conversations were perceived as more substantive than positive material conversations ($M_{exp} = 5.46$, *SD* = 1.04 vs. $M_{mat} = 4.46$, *SD* = 1.54; $F(1, 175) = 26.04$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .13$). On the other hand, negative experiential and material conversations were perceived as equally substantive ($M_{exp} = 4.47$, *SD* = 1.38 vs. $M_{mat} = 4.38$, *SD* = 1.58; $F(1, 203) < 1$, $p = .65$, $\eta^2 = .001$). These results demonstrate the expected moderating effect of purchase valence (Figure 2).

[Insert Figure 2 about Here]

Social connection. A conversation topic by purchase valence ANOVA on social connection showed significant effects of conversation topic ($M_{exp} = 4.61$, *SD* = 1.46 vs. $M_{mat} = 4.05$, *SD* = 1.50; $F(1, 378) = 16.34$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .04$), purchase valence ($M_{pos} = 4.77$, *SD* = 1.44 vs. $M_{neg} = 3.98$, *SD* = 1.46; $F(1, 378) = 27.30$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .06$), and the proposed conversation topic by purchase valence interaction ($F(1, 378) = 11.48$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2 = .02$). Further analyses confirmed that, for positive purchases, experiential conversations generated stronger bonds than did material conversations ($M_{exp} = 5.27$, *SD* = 1.09 vs. $M_{mat} = 4.20$, *SD* = 1.58; $F(1, 175) = 28.22$,

$p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .13$). In contrast, for negative purchases, experiential and material conversations led to equal levels of social connection ($M_{exp} = 4.02$, $SD = 1.49$ vs. $M_{mat} = 3.93$, $SD = 1.42$; $F(1, 203) < 1$, $p = .64$, $\eta^2 = .001$) (Figure 3).

[Insert Figure 3 about Here]

Listener happiness. A conversation topic by purchase valence ANOVA on listener happiness showed no effect of conversation topic ($M_{exp} = 3.72$, $SD = 1.98$ vs. $M_{mat} = 3.54$, $SD = 1.69$; $F(1, 378) = 1.95$, $p = .16$, $\eta^2 = .005$), a significant effect of purchase valence ($M_{pos} = 4.90$, $SD = 1.46$ vs. $M_{neg} = 2.54$, $SD = 1.39$; $F(1, 378) = 265.45$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .41$), and the predicted conversation topic by purchase valence interaction ($F(1, 378) = 21.79$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .05$; Figure 4). For positive purchases, listeners derived more happiness from experiential ($M = 5.31$, $SD = 1.22$) than material conversations ($M = 4.44$, $SD = 1.59$; $F(1, 175) = 16.77$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .08$). On the other hand—and unexpectedly—for negative purchases, listeners gained more happiness from material ($M = 2.78$, SD = 1.38) than experiential conversations ($M = 2.31$, $SD = 1.37$; $F(1, 203) = 5.88$, $p = .01$, $\eta^2 = .02$).

[Insert Figure 4 about Here]

***Moderated sequential mediation*.** An analysis using PROCESS model 83 tested whether the sequential mechanism via substantiveness and social connection transmitted the effect for positive but not for negative purchases. Results showed non-significant effects of conversation topic ($b = 0.90$, $SE = 0.19$, $t(378) = 0.47$, $p = .63$) and purchase valence ($b = 0.80$, $SE = 0.20$, $t(378) = 0.38$, $p = .69$) on substantiveness. There was a significant interaction effect of conversation topic by purchase valence on substantiveness ($b = 0.90$, $SE = 0.28$, $t(378) = 3.14$, $p = .001$). As reported in the ANOVA results, experiential conversations were perceived as significantly more substantive than material conversations in the positive ($b = 0.99$, $SE = 0.21$,

$t(378) = 4.73$, $p < .001$) but not in the negative valence condition ($b = 0.90$, $SE = 0.19$, $t(378) = 0.47$, $p = .63$). Further, substantiveness significantly influenced social connection ($b = 0.73$, $SE = 0.03$, $t(379) = 19.91$, $p < .001$) but conversation topic did not ($b = 0.17$, $SE = 0.10$, $t(379) = 1.63$, $p = .10$). Next, social connection ($b = 0.67$, $SE = 0.07$, $t(378) = 9.40$, $p < .001$) and substantiveness significantly affected listener happiness ($b = 0.16$, $SE = 0.70$, $t(378) = 2.26$, $p = .02$), while the previously significant effect of conversation topic was reduced to marginally significant ($b = -0.28$, $SE = 0.15$, $t(378) = -1.91$, $p = .056$). More critically, and in line with this work's predictions, purchase valence significantly moderated the sequential mediation ($b = 0.44$, $SE = 0.15$, 95% CI = [0.16, 0.75]); such that the sequential indirect effect via substantiveness and social connection manifested for positive ($b = 0.49$, $SE = 0.11$, 95% CI = [0.27, 0.72]) but not negative purchases ($b = 0.04$, $SE = 0.10$, 95% CI = [-0.15, 0.25]).

Discussion

Study 3 corroborates the earlier results and demonstrates that the relations in the model are conditional on purchase valence. Replicating the previous findings, listeners reported higher conversation substantiveness, stronger social connections, and greater happiness after hearing about positive experiential (vs. material) purchases. Conversely, listeners reported equal conversation substantiveness and social connections after hearing about negative experiential and material purchases. These results underscore the hypothesized process mechanism. Ultimately, the experiential advantage observed for positive purchases was eliminated for negative purchases. These findings dovetail with prior work on the qualifying effect of purchase valence on the happiness purchasers extract from their experiential and material acquisitions due to psychological adaptation (Nicolao, Irwin, and Goodman 2009). The present results show that, for negative purchases, the *experience recommendation* disappears not only for the purchaser

herself, but also for those exposed to the purchase via conversation. However, in the present model, the reason is different—conversation substantiveness.

Interestingly, while the valence manipulation was designed to neutralize the effects of substantiveness and social connection in the negative purchase condition, it went beyond eliminating the experiential advantage, such that the advantage in fact shifted to material conversations: listeners gained more happiness from hearing about negative material than negative experiential purchases. However, the moderated-mediation results show that the mechanism via substantiveness and social connection does not account for this difference, suggesting that other mechanisms explain the effects of happiness for conversations about negative purchases; the General Discussion elaborates on this finding.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The South African novelist Bryce Courtenay once said, “When we cease to tell or listen, then we no longer exist as a people.” While the aspirations in this research were substantially more modest than studying our existence as a society, the reported findings suggest that listening is indeed an important element in the business of bonding with others and pursuing happiness. The present work investigated how hearing others talk about different types of purchases (experiential vs. material purchases) affects the listener’s happiness. Results from four studies consistently show that people derive more happiness from conversations about experiences than those about material objects (Web Appendix F reports a single-paper meta-analysis summarizing this result across Studies 1-3 and five additional unreported studies documented in Web Appendix E). To explain this effect, this work theorizes and shows empirically that conversation substantiveness and social connection sequentially underlie the relation between conversation topic (experiential vs. material purchases) and listener happiness. Importantly, this mechanism

explains the effect above and beyond the explanation provided by a mechanism centered on a person's perceived motivation of the purchaser (Van Boven, Campbell, and Gilovich 2010). Further, this work identifies a boundary condition of the model: purchase valence. The findings show that the effects in the model hold for conversations about positive but not those about negative purchases.

This investigation tested the predicted model with different operationalizations of experiential versus material conversations (i.e., high-realism face-to-face, computer-mediated, imagined) and distinct samples (i.e., college students from the United States, members of an online subject pool). The convergent evidence emerging from these varied approaches speaks to the robustness and generalizability of the model.

Contributions

This research advances theory and informs marketing managers, consumers, and policymakers. From a theory perspective, this work makes several contributions. First, it extends the experiential versus material purchase literature beyond its current focus on the actual purchaser (e.g., Bastos and Brucks 2017; Carter and Gilovich 2010, 2012; Nicolao, Irwin, and Goodman 2009; Van Boven and Gilovich 2003) or the recipient of a purchase who, like the purchaser, gets to consume the purchase (i.e., a gift recipient; Chan and Mogilner 2017). It does so by showing that the experiential advantage in cultivating happiness applies also to listeners of purchase-related conversations—i.e., people whose only link to the purchase is the conversation. Therefore, this work brings a new perspective to the greater ability of experiences to advance happiness by being the first to show that this effect manifests even without direct consumption of the purchase—an "indirect experiential advantage." This new knowledge is relevant because it shows that the scope of the experiential advantage is wider than previously known.

Relatedly, by distinguishing the two conversation roles—teller and listener—and focusing exclusively on the latter, this investigation adds to past work, where the two roles were conflated (Van Boven, Campbell, and Gilovich 2010). Specifically, the present investigation shows conclusively that the behavior of listening is, by itself, sufficient to engender different social and psychological outcomes.

Additionally, this investigation identifies a unique mechanism through which this effect unfolds—a sequential indirect path via conversation substantiveness and social connection. Besides explaining the effect, the results of three studies (Study 2 reported in the manuscript and Replication Studies 1 and 2 reported in Web Appendix E) demonstrate that this mechanism adds explaining power to what was previously known in the literature. Specifically, adding to Van Boven, Campbell, and Gilovich's (2010) insightful finding that a person's *perception of a conversation partner* associated with an experiential versus material purchase influences how much they like the partner, this work shows that the listener's *perception of the conversation* explains an additional and separate proportion of the different social connections listeners develop towards experiential versus material tellers. Therefore, this work deepens the understanding about the social outcomes of purchase-related conversations.

Finally, by searching for a boundary of the model, this work reveals that purchase valence qualifies a novel mechanism via conversation substantiveness. This finding adds to previous evidence indicating that purchase valence moderates psychological adaptation (Nicolao, Irwin, and Goodman 2009), uniqueness (Bastos 2019), and perceived positive impact (Bastos and Barsade, 2020) associated with experiential versus material purchases.

Besides extending theory, the findings better equip marketing managers to deliver intangible value to consumers in the form of social bonds and happiness. First, by fostering

consumer conversations—especially those about experiential purchases—marketing managers can exert a positive influence on the social lives and happiness of not only existing customers (i.e., those talking about their own purchases, as past research shows; Bastos and Brucks 2017; Kumar and Gilovich 2015) but also potential customers (i.e., those hearing for the first time about somebody's purchase, as the present research shows). This knowledge points to a way managers can enlarge their sphere of influence and positively affect also people who have not yet invested in their offerings. This is important because it enables the manager to not only contribute to those people's psychological well-being by making them happier but also benefit the firm. Naturally, when firms invest in WOM initiatives, a major goal is to elicit firm-desired behaviors from the people who receive the WOM information. Indeed, the power of WOM to get potential consumers to try (Van den Bulte and Wuyts 2009) and buy products (Chevalier and Mayzlin 2006; Godes and Mayzlin 2009) is a well-known phenomenon. It stands to reason that WOM that makes the WOM recipient happier has an even greater influence on their behaviors—an idea supported by evidence that happiness leads people to be more active in various domains of life (Lyubomirsky, King, and Diener 2005). Hence the knowledge advanced here makes WOM an even more powerful tool for the manager. In practical terms, Study 2 offers a useful tool for managers to have a positive influence in this way; a tool that is especially helpful for managers offering the type of purchase knowing to advance less happiness—material purchases. The findings from that study indicate that managers should focus consumers' attention on and encourage conversations about the experiential (vs. material) aspects of a purchase. Firms can exert such influence via, for example, social media (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010), WOM and referral programs (Biyalogorsky, Gerstner, and Libai 2000), and brand community activities (Schau, Muniz, and Arnould 2009). BMW's #Un4gettable Weekend initiative, where fans of the

brand engaged in weekend-long activities around the car-maker's automobiles, illustrates how marketing managers can bring out the experiential properties of an inherently material purchase.

For consumers, this work serves an informational purpose. While listeners may not always be able to select the conversations to which they are exposed (Christophe and Rimé 1997), knowing which types of conversation are more likely to be substantive, strengthen social ties, and increase happiness will allow listeners to nurture such conversations and derive social and emotional benefits from them. In the same vein, this knowledge enables tellers to distinguish among purchase-related topics and share those more conducive to building interpersonal ties—i.e., experiential purchases. Here, the finding that conversation substantiveness accounts for variance in social connection above and beyond perceived motivation is especially relevant. Whereas it can be difficult to change people's motivations behind their purchases—e.g., influence someone who is inherently driven by external motives such as status to be driven by internal motives such as meaningfulness—such that the purchase-related conversations they engage in engender stronger social bonds, it is readily suitable to change the content of a conversation such that it is perceived as more substantive and, consequently, more bonding. Given research showing that social connection is waning (McPherson, Smith-Loving, and Brashears 2006), and that isolation and loneliness are increasing (Lee and Robbins 1995) and are related to materialism (Pieters 2013), this knowledge has particular relevance.

National governments and policymakers have become increasingly more interested in the psychological well-being of their peoples. Illustrating this, the Gross National Happiness Index has been used by an already large and still growing number of countries (Veenhoven 2007). Research in experiential versus material purchases has suggested that, to promote more experiential pursuits and therefore societal happiness, governments should "provide and maintain

bicycle paths and cycling lanes, hiking trails and public parks, beaches and community swimming pools, and museums and performance halls", which Gilovich and Kumar (2014) referred to as "experiential engineering." The present work echoes these ideas and suggests that they can be even more beneficial than previous discourse has realized. First, these and similar recommendations intend to facilitate that people "[t]ilt one's spending a bit more in the direction of experience and a bit less in the direction of material possessions" (Gilovich, Kumar, and Jampol 2014, 160). However, according to past evidence indicating that people tend to talk about topics that are cued by the environment (Berger and Schwartz 2011), these experience-centered infrastructures (e.g., a park) are likely to remind their users of similar experiences they have had (e.g., a visit to a theme park) and thus encourage conversations about those experiences. The listeners in those conversations should benefit as well. This is especially valuable for at least three reasons: First, whereas the purchaser (i.e., the teller) is normally a single individual, the listening audience can and often is larger in numbers—i.e., there is a magnifying effect in the number of people who gain happiness from the purchaser's experience. Second, as past research into the purchaser has acknowledged, "The availability of at least some disposable income, then, may be precondition for the effects we have reviewed here" (Gilovich and Kumar 2015, 27) and that the psychological benefits advanced by this research stream are attainable "[a]t least in wealthy societies in which people have a fair amount of disposable income, they can simply choose to spend more on experiences than on material goods" (Gilovich, Kumar, and Jampol 2015, 160), such favorable conditions are still beyond the reach of many. Hence, government initiatives that enable people to experience others' experiences indirectly, via listening to them in a conversation, present an alternative. Finally, and perhaps paradoxically, the type of purchase best able to advance happiness—experiences—tends to be available only temporarily. When a

person passes up on the chance to see a sports game or to visit a museum exhibition, the missed opportunity is unlikely to exist again in the future. That is, experiences are often a "unique opportunity" (Bastos 2019, p. 584). In these cases, initiatives intended to facilitate experiential conversations enable past experiences that are no longer available to keep advancing happiness even in people who did not consume them. In sum, "[h]appiness is rising on the political agenda" (Veenhoven 2007, 231) and this works points to ways that society can benefit from that agenda.

Limitations and Future Research

The current paper has several limitations, some of which open up avenues for future research. First, while this work demonstrates that the effects in the model are contingent on purchase valence, additional boundary conditions are a promising domain for future inquiry. For instance, researchers could examine whether conversation substantiveness and social connection vary in physically-present (e.g., face-to-face) versus technology-mediated communications (e.g., telephone), or in synchronous (e.g., online chat) versus asynchronous channels (e.g., email; Berger and Iyengar 2013). Asynchronous (non-contemporaneous) channels elicit the exchange of more interesting content than synchronous channels because they allow people to more carefully choose what to say (Berger and Iyengar 2013); thus, asynchronous channels may enhance the otherwise modest bonding potential of material conversations. Other potential moderators are the listener's perception of the purchase as extraordinary (Arnould and Price 1993; Cooney, Gilbert, and Wilson 2014) or (un)attainable (Argo et al. 2006). Such perceptions could, respectively, lead to feelings of exclusion and self-threat, thus hindering social relationship development. Additionally, past research has identified a negative relation between an individual's macro-consumption attitudes and their psychological well-being (Iyer and Muncy 2016). Accordingly, it is possible that attitude towards consumption qualifies the relations in the present model.

Second, Study 3 showed that the mechanism via substantiveness and social connection cannot account for the happiness advantage of negative material over negative experiential conversations, so future research could identify the mechanism responsible for this effect. Third, introducing the concept of conversation substantiveness into marketing should spur additional WOM-related inquiries. One possibility is to examine what strategies firms and consumers might employ to overcome restrictions imposed by some social media platforms (e.g., Twitter's 140 character limit) and still communicate substantively. Alternately, studying such platforms or channels might reveal unique benefits of trivial conversations.

The area of purchase-related conversations is indeed a ripe one for future discoveries. Whatever direction future research takes, researchers are wise to consider the conceptualization of key constructs that have arisen recently. In the teller's domain, Kumar and Gilovich (2015) and Bastos and Brucks (2017) advanced the constructs of story utility and conversational value. The two share the commonality of being associated with the likelihood of a purchase being talked about. In the listener's domain, the present work introduces the construct of conversation substantiveness, which differently from the earlier two constructs, is associated with the listener's perception of the conversation as meaningful and involving. These precise conceptual definitions will be advantageous for the progress of this growing research program.

Conclusion

Listening is typically portrayed as a socially valued behavior; it is part of being civil towards others. This investigation suggests that listening helps us connect as social beings and make strides towards the seemingly universal goal of happiness—both of which contribute to our civil condition.

List of Web Appendices

Web Appendix A: Manipulation Texts (Studies 2 and 3)

Web Appendix B: Results of Confirmatory Factor Analyses and Convergent and Discriminant Validity Tests

Web Appendix C: Results with Reduced 3-Item Measure of Listener Happiness (Studies 2 and 3)

Web Appendix D: Report of All Links of the Sequential Mediation Model (Study 2)

Web Appendix E: Five Replication Studies

Web Appendix F: Single-Paper Meta-Analysis

Web Appendix A: Manipulation Texts (Studies 2 and 3)

Study 2

<<All Participants>>

Important information: In this study we would like to learn about interpersonal conversation and to test an online chat platform. These days, chat platforms often give people full sentences that they can just select and send to their conversation partner. In this study, you will select and send some sentences to a conversation partner and wait for him/her to write you a response. After that, we will ask you some questions about your conversation with this person. Your conversation partner is another Mturker who we will connect you with. We gave that person a topic for him/her to tell you about in the conversation.

Please click next for the study to establish a chat connection with the other person. After the conversation we will ask you some questions about it.

—PAGE BREAK—

You are now connected with your conversation partner.

Please click next to see the first pair of sentences you can select from.

You can start the conversation by sending the other Mturker one of the following questions. Select the one you want to send him/her and click next.

- Hi. How are you?

- Hello. How is your day going?

—PAGE BREAK—

<<Response from Teller>>

- Hi! I’m doing fine. Thanks. You knoww, I'm just here on the computer. I guess it's the same for you.

- Hello! The day is going fine. Thanks. You knoww, I'm just here on the computer. I guess it's the same for you.

—PAGE BREAK—

Select your next sentence.

- How long have you done Mturk?

- What are you preferred tasks on Mturk?

—PAGE BREAK—

<<Response from Teller>>

- I have been doing this for a few months. I like it a lot. Of course there are good things and bad things, but for the most part I find Mturk really good. By the way, thanks for asking!

- I have been doing all types. I like it a lot. Of course there are good things and bad things, but for the most part I find Mturk really good. By the way, thanks for asking!

—PAGE BREAK—

- I was told that you had a topic to tell me about? What is it?

- The researchers told me that you were going to tell me about a certain topic? What’s that?

—PAGE BREAK—

<<Experiential Condition Text>>

Yes, that's right. They asked me to tell you about a time when I spent money, basically, to have an experience. I can tell you about one purchase I clearly remember. This happened about 7 months ago. I got a BBQ grill called BBQ X. You know, in my mind a grill is really about having a nice experience at home. I've enjoyed using it a lot. What a cool experience! I could tell you the details of that BBQ experience, but I guess you can imagine it, right?

<<Material Condition Text>>

Yes, that's right. They asked me to tell you about a time when I spent money, basically, to have an object. I can tell you about one purchase I clearly remember. This happened about 7 months ago. I got a BBQ grill called BBQ X. You know, in my mind a grill is really about having a nice object at home. I've enjoyed owning it a lot. What a cool object! I could tell you the details of that BBQ object, but I guess you can imagine it, right?

—PAGE BREAK—

- I see. Can you tell me more about it?

- Yes, I can imagine. Would you give more details about it?

—PAGE BREAK—

<<Experiential Condition Text>>

Definitely! This grill gives me some of the best outdoor experiences I have ever had. It’s just the type of thing that you’re glad to experience, you know? It’s all about having good moments around the grill. That’s what matters, isn’t it?

Anyway, I like it a lot. I have lots of great moments with it. If you are looking for a great experience in the outdoors, I definitely recommend a grill like this. It’s a wonderful experience to have!

<<Material Condition Text>>

Definitely! This grill is one of the best outdoor objects I have ever had. It’s just the type of thing that you’re glad to own, you know? It’s all about having good features around the grill. That’s what matters, isn’t it?

Anyway, I like it a lot. It has lots of great features. If you are looking for a great object for the outdoors, I definitely recommend a grill like this. It’s a wonderful object to own!

—PAGE BREAK—

- Got it. Thanks for telling me about it. I wish you a good day.

—END OF THE INTERACTION—

Study 3 Script

Manipulation of Material Purchase, Positive and <Negative>

Read this carefully:

Imagine that you have recently joined a social organization of your choice. At one of this organization's gatherings, you meet another person and the two of you spend some time talking. The focus of your conversation is on material objects that the other person has paid a certain amount of money to have. In other words, this person shares with you some details about their objects. The particular objects they share with you are objects that turned out well <did not turn out well>; they enjoyed these objects <they did not enjoy these objects>. For example, the other person may have told you about their clothes, furniture, jewelry, or various types of electronic gadgets.

Please take a few seconds to image what this conversation would be like.

—PAGE BREAK—

Now we'd like you to write, in some detail, about the conversation you imagined.

On the following screens, you will write using a guided process, where you will be asked to fill in the blanks in different sentences to describe your conversation. Each sentence will appear on a separate screen. You do not have to worry about grammar or spelling and you can be creative filling in the blanks, as long as the sentences make sense.

—PAGE BREAK—

The objects the other person told me about were a(an) [in a few words, write down the types of objects] _____.

To be more specific, when sharing details about their objects, they told me that the objects were _____.

In telling me that the objects turned out well <had not turned out well> and that they had enjoyed <not enjoyed> the objects, the other person said that _____.

Manipulation of Experiential Purchase, Positive and <Negative>

Read this carefully:

Imagine that you have recently joined a social organization of your choice. At one of this organization's gatherings, you meet another person and the two of you spend some time talking. The focus of your conversation is on experiences that the other person has paid a certain amount of money to have. In other words, this person shares with you some details about their experiences. The particular experiences they share with you are ones that turned out well <did not turn out well>; they enjoyed these experiences <they did not enjoy these experiences>. For example, the other person may have told you about their vacations, meals at restaurants, theater performances, and music concerts.

Please take a few seconds to image what the conversation with that person would be like.

—PAGE BREAK—

Now we'd like you to write, in some detail, about the conversation you imagined.

On the following screens, you will write using a guided process, where you will be asked to fill in the blanks in different sentences to describe your conversation. Each sentence will appear on a separate screen. You do not have to worry about grammar or spelling and you can be creative filling in the blanks, as long as the sentences make sense.

—PAGE BREAK—

The experiences the other person told me about were a(an) [in a few words, write down the types of experiences] _____.

To be more specific, when sharing details about their experiences, they told me that the experiences were _____.

In telling me that the experiences turned out well <did not turn out well> and that they had enjoyed <not enjoyed> the experiences, the other person said that _____.

Web Appendix B: Results of Confirmatory Factor Analyses, Convergent and Discriminant Validity Tests, and Inter-item Correlations

Study 2

Table B1. Correlation Matrix—Study 2.

		Correlations		
Labels	Variables	M1	M2	Y
M1	Substantive Conversation	--		
M2	Social Connection	.815	--	
Y	Listener Happiness	.780	.813	--

Study 3

Measurement model. Results from the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA; AMOS) yielded: $\chi^2(37) = 117.43$, $p < .001$, CMIN/DF = 3.17, RMSEA = .08, NNFI = .97, and CFI = .98, indicating that the measurement model was in line with established parameters of adequate model fit (Bagozzi & Yi, 2012). Given the proper fit of the empirical three-factor model, the analyses considered these factors as separate constructs.

Using the same Fornell and Larcker's (1981) criteria to test the convergent and discriminant validity of the three constructs, this work obtains the following results, which strongly support both validities.

Table B2. Results from Convergent and Discriminant Validity Analyses—Study 3.

Construct	Reliability (α)	AVE	MSV	ASV	SQRT of AVE
Conversation Substantiveness	0.78	0.63	0.52	0.39	0.80
Social Connection	0.94	0.76	0.52	0.46	0.87
Listener Happiness	0.95	0.85	0.39	0.33	0.92

Correlation Matrix—Study 3.

		Correlations		
Labels	Variables	M1	M2	Y
M1	Substantive Conversation	--		
M2	Social Connection	.724	--	
Y	Listener Happiness	.511	.625	--

Web Appendix C: Results with Reduced 3-Item Measure of Listener Happiness (Studies 2 and 3)

This appendix documents the results of the direct and indirect effects for Studies 2 and 3 with the reduced 3-item measure of listener happiness.

Study 2

Listener happiness. Listeners gained significantly more happiness from conversations focusing on the experiential rather than the material properties of the grill (M_{exp} = 4.16, SD = 1.57 vs. M_{mat} = 3.68, SD = 1.70; $F(1, 400) = 8.60$, $p = .004$, Cohen's $d = 0.29$), supporting Hypothesis 1.

Two-Step Sequential Mediation. The indirect effect of conversation topic on listener happiness was significant via both paths: 'substantiveness → social connection' (two-step sequential mediation: β = 0.16, SE = 0.07, 95% CI = [0.02, 0.31]), supporting Hypothesis 2; and 'perceived motivation → social connection' (two-step sequential mediation: β = 0.05, SE = 0.01, 95% CI = [0.02, 0.09]), replicating Van Boven, Campbell, and Gilovich (2010). Results from a contrast analysis showed that neither pathway transmitted a significant proportion of the indirect effect (β = 0.11, SE = 0.07, 95% CI = [−0.03, 0.26]).

Study 3

Listener happiness. A conversation topic by purchase valence ANOVA on listener happiness showed no effect of conversation topic (M_{exp} = 3.68, *SD* = 2.00 vs. M_{mat} = 3.48, *SD* 1.72; $F(1, 378) = 2.54$, $p = .11$, $\eta^2 = .007$), a significant effect of purchase valence (M_{pos} = 4.80, *SD* = 1.53 vs. M_{neg} = 2.54, *SD* = 1.47*;* $F(1, 378) = 220.10$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .36$), and the predicted conversation topic by purchase valence interaction ($F(1, 378) = 21.61$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .05$). For positive purchases, listeners derived more happiness from experiential than material conversations (M_{exp} = 5.24, *SD* = 1.25 vs. M_{mat} = 4.30, *SD* = 1.66; $F(1, 175) = 18.05$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .09$). On the other hand—and unexpectedly—for negative purchases, listeners gained more happiness from material than experiential conversations (M_{exp} = 2.32, *SD* = 1.46 vs. M_{mat} = 2.78, *SD* = 1.44; $F(1, 203) = 5.06$, $p = .02$, $\eta^2 = .02$).

Moderated sequential mediation. An analysis using PROCESS model 83 tested whether the sequential mechanism via substantiveness and social connection transmitted the effect for positive but not for negative purchases. This analysis used the reduced, three-item version of the measure of listener happiness. Results showed non-significant effects of conversation topic (b = 0.09, SE = 0.19, $t(378) = 0.47$, $p = .63$) and purchase valence (b = 0.08, SE = 0.20, $t(378) = 0.38$, $p = .69$) on substantiveness. There was a significant interaction effect of conversation topic by purchase valence on substantiveness (b = 0.90, SE = 0.28, $t(378) = 3.14$, $p = .001$). As reported in the ANOVA results, experiential conversations were perceived as significantly more substantive than material conversations in the positive (b = 0.99, SE = 0.21, $t(378) = 4.73$, $p < .001$) but not in the negative valence condition (b = 0.09, SE = 0.19, $t(378) = 0.47$, $p = .63$). Further, substantiveness significantly influenced social connection (b = 0.73, SE = 0.03, $t(379)$ =

19.91, $p < .001$) but conversation topic did not ($b = 0.17$, $SE = 0.10$, $t(379) = 1.63$, $p = .10$). Next, social connection ($b = 0.67$, $SE = 0.07$, $t(378) = 9.55$, $p < .001$) and substantiveness significantly affected listener happiness ($b = 0.18$, $SE = 0.07$, $t(378) = 2.52$, $p = .01$), while the previously significant effect of conversation topic was reduced to marginally significant ($b = -0.26$, $SE = 0.15$, $t(378) = -1.77$, $p = .07$). More critically, and in line with this work's predictions, purchase valence significantly moderated the sequential mediation ($b = 0.16$, $SE = 0.08$, 95% CI = [0.02, 0.37]); such that the sequential indirect effect via substantiveness and social connection manifested for positive ($b = 0.18$, $SE = 0.08$, 95% CI = [0.04, 0.36]) but not negative purchases ($b = 0.01$, $SE = 0.04$, 95% CI = [-0.06, 0.10]).

Web Appendix D: Report of All Links of the Sequential Mediation Model (Study 2)

Study 2

Outcome variable: Conversation Substantiveness

Experiential versus material conversation (b = 0.37, SE = 0.16, t(400) = 2.32, p = .02, 95% CI = [0.05, 0.69]).

Outcome variable: Perceived motivation

Experiential versus material conversation (b = 0.84, SE = 0.16, t(400) = 5.26, $p < .001$, 95% CI = [0.52, 1.15]).

Outcome variable: Social connection

Experiential versus material conversation (b = -0.04, SE = 0.09, t(398) = -0.43, p = .66, 95% CI = [-0.22, 0.14]).

Conversation substantiveness (b = 0.75, SE = 0.02, t(398) = 27.88, $p < .001$, 95% CI = [0.70, 0.81]).

Perceived motivation (b = 0.11, SE = 0.02, t(398) = 4.20, $p < .001$, 95% CI = [0.06, 0.17]).

Outcome variable: Listener happiness

Experiential versus material conversation (b = 0.24, SE = 0.09, t(397) = 2.68, p = .007, 95% CI = [0.06, 0.42]).

Conversation substantiveness (b = 0.32, SE = 0.04, t(397) = 7.07, $p < .001$, 95% CI = [0.23, 0.41]).

Perceived motivation (b = -0.05, SE = 0.02, t(397) = -2.01, p = .04, 95% CI = [-0.11, -0.001]).

Social connection (b = 0.56, SE = 0.04, t(397) = 11.44, $p < .001$, 95% CI = [0.46, 0.66]).

Indirect effects

Conversation substantiveness (*b* = 0.12, *SE* = 0.05, 95% CI = [0.01, 0.24]).

Perceived motivation (*b* = -0.04, *SE* = 0.02, 95% CI = [-0.10, 0.0003]).

Social connection (*b* = -0.02, *SE* = 0.05, 95% CI = [-0.11, 0.07]).

Conversation substantiveness → Social connection (*b* = 0.16, *SE* = 0.07, 95% CI = [0.02, 0.30]).

Perceived motivations → Social connection (*b* = 0.05, *SE* = 0.01, 95% CI = [0.02, 0.09]).

Web Appendix E: Replication Studies

Replication Study 1

This study has two objectives. First, to examine similar purchases and help neutralize idiosyncrasies between the experiential and material purchases (a potential weakness of Study 1 in the manuscript that Study 2 in the manuscript also helps address). This study keeps the nature of the purchase constant (skiing related purchases) and manipulates whether the conversation involved skiing experiences or skiing objects. Second, this study retests the predicted mechanism (i.e., conversation substantiveness → social connection) and whether it explains the effect above and beyond the previously-advanced mechanism centered on perceived motivation (Van Boven, Campbell, and Gilovich 2010).

Procedures

Two hundred and eighty-two Masters level business students from a European university (females = 56%, M_{age} = 23.27, SD = 1.56) completed this between-subjects study for course credit. Using a similar computer-based approach as in Study 2, the study introduced participants to the idea of conversing with another participant who was also in the lab and who was assigned a topic to tell them about. After being connected with the teller, exchanging similar introductory messages, and asking the teller about the topic, participants in the experiential (vs. material) condition received the reply message: “Yes, that's right. They asked me to tell you about a time when I spent money, basically, to have an experience (object). I can tell you about one purchase I clearly remember. This happened about 7 months ago. I walked into a store at a skiing resort that sells various types of skiing experiences (objects) to visitors. You know, in my mind skiing activities (products) are really about having nice winter/outdoor experiences (objects). I ended up

purchasing one of the skiing experiences (objects) that they offered. What a cool experience (object)! I could tell you the details of that skiing experience (object), but I guess you can imagine it, right?"

Participants then engaged in one more exchange with the teller. After asking teller to say more about the purchase (e.g., "I see. Can you tell me more about it?"), those in the experiential (vs. material) condition received the message: "Definitely! That purchase allowed me to have one of the best outdoor experiences (objects) I have ever had. It's just the type of thing that you're glad to experience (own), you know? It's all about having good moments around the experience (having good features around the equipment). That's what matters, isn't it? Anyway, I liked it a lot. I had lots of great moments there (It has a lot of great features). If you are looking for a great experience in (equipment for) the outdoors, I definitely recommend something like this. It's a wonderful experience to have (object to own)!" Next, participants ended the conversation by sending the message, "Got it. Thanks for telling me about it. I wish you a good day."

After being informed that the interaction was over and being assured anonymity, participants answered the same two-item measure of substantiveness ($r = .57$, $p < .001$), five-item measure of social connection ($\alpha = .88$), four-item measure of listener happiness ($\alpha = .89$), and six-item measure of intrinsic-extrinsic perceived motivation as in Study 2. Last, participants completed a two-item measure serving as manipulation check ("The purchase they described earlier is:"; 1 = *Definitely a material object*; 7 = *Definitely an experience*; "The purchase is:"; 1 = *Something tangible that one can keep in his/her possession*; 7 = *Something that enables experiences*; $r = .86$, $p < .001$).

Results

Measurement model. The measurement model was designed to capture three separate factors forming the predicted model—conversation substantiveness, social connection, and listener happiness. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA; AMOS) tested whether the data fit this proposed three-factor model. Results yielded: $\chi^2(36) = 72.34$, $p < .001$, CMIN/DF = 2.01, RMSEA = .06, NNFI = .97, and CFI = .98, indicating that the measurement model was in line with established parameters of adequate model fit (Bagozzi and Yi 2012). Given the proper fit of the empirical three-factor model, the analyses considered these factors as separate constructs.

Next, using Fornell and Larcker's (1981) criteria, this work examined the convergent and discriminant validity of the measures capturing the three constructs. Supporting their convergent validity, the average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct was greater than .05, and the reliability for each was greater than their respective AVE; hence satisfying the two criteria of convergent validity. Next, supporting their discriminant validity, the maximum shared variance (MSV) and the average shared variance (ASV) for each construct were smaller than their respective AVE, and, importantly, the square root of AVE for each was greater than their inter-construct correlations; thereby satisfying all the three criteria of discriminant validity (Table E1).

Table E1. Results from Convergent and Discriminant Validity Analyses—Replication Study 1

Construct	Reliability (α)	AVE	MSV	ASV	SQRT of AVE
Conversation Substantiveness	0.72	0.58	0.41	0.39	0.76
Social Connection	0.88	0.60	0.46	0.41	0.77
Listener Happiness	0.89	0.68	0.46	0.44	0.82

Correlation Matrix—Replication Study 1.

Labels	Variables	Correlations		
		M1	M2	Y
M1	Substantive Conversation	--		
M2	Social Connection	.599	--	
Y	Listener Happiness	.643	.677	--

Manipulation check. An ANOVA testing whether the manipulation had the intended effect showed that experiential condition participants thought of the conversation as significantly more experiential (M = 6.05, SD = 1.26) than material condition participants (M = 2.84, SD = 1.93; $F(1, 280) = 275.42$, $p < .001$, Cohen's d = 1.96), supporting the purpose of the manipulation.

Listener happiness. Results showed that listeners gained significantly more happiness from conversations about skiing experience (M = 4.03, SD = 1.34) than skiing objects (M = 3.25, SD = 1.44; $F(1, 280) = 22.05$, $p < .001$, Cohen's d = 0.56), supporting Hypothesis 1.

Two-step sequential mediation. This analysis of sequential mediation treated conversation topic as the independent variable, conversation substantiveness as step 1 mediator, social connection as step 2 mediator, and listener happiness as the dependent variable. Besides conversation substantiveness, the analysis also included perceived motivation as a potential step 1 mediator. The analysis used PROCESS model 80 since this model allows for tests of sequential mediation of a framework containing two mediators in its first step (Hayes 2017).

The indirect effect of conversation topic on listener happiness was significant via both paths: 'conversation substantiveness → social connection' (two-step sequential mediation: β =

0.15, *SE* = 0.04, 95% CI = [0.07, 0.25]), supporting Hypothesis 2; and 'perceived motivation → social connection' (two-step sequential mediation: β = 0.04, *SE* = 0.01, 95% CI = [0.009, 0.08]), replicating Van Boven, Campbell, and Gilovich (2010). An additional contrast analysis indicated that the path via conversation substantiveness transmitted a significantly greater proportion of the variance than did that via perceived motivation (β = 0.11, *SE* = 0.04, 95% CI = [0.02, 0.21]).

Discussion

Tis study shows that listeners derive more happiness from a purchase-related conversation when it is centered on experiential than material purchases. Further, and replicating Study 2 in the manuscript, results support conversation substantiveness and social connection as a sequential explanation, which accounts for the effect above and beyond the sequential explanation via perceived motivation and social connection (Van Boven, Campbell, and Gilovich 2010).

Reporting of All Paths Forming the Sequential Mediation

This section documents the results for all links of the two-step sequential mediation analysis.

Outcome variable: Conversation Substantiveness

Experiential versus material conversation (*b* = 0.65, *SE* = 0.17, *t*(280) = 3.75, $p < .001$, 95% CI = [0.30, 0.99]).

Outcome variable: Perceived motivation

Experiential versus material conversation (*b* = 0.78, *SE* = 0.19, *t*(280) = 4.04, $p < .001$, 95% CI = [0.40, 1.16]).

Outcome variable: Social connection

Experiential versus material conversation (*b* = 0.06, *SE* = 0.12, *t*(278) = 0.49, $p = .61$, 95% CI = [-0.17, 0.29]).

Conversation substantiveness (b = 0.45, SE = 0.04, t(278) = 11.16, p < .001, 95% CI = [0.37, 0.54]).

Perceived motivation (b = 0.10, SE = 0.03, t(278) = 2.80, p =.005, 95% CI = [0.03, 0.17]).

Outcome variable: Listener happiness

Experiential versus material conversation (b = 0.34, SE = 0.12, t(277) = 2.86, p = .004, 95% CI = [0.10, 0.58]).

Conversation substantiveness (b = 0.34, SE = 0.04, t(277) = 7.01, p < .001, 95% CI = [0.24, 0.44]).

Perceived motivation (b = -0.02, SE = 0.03, t(277) = -0.78, p = .43, 95% CI = [-0.10, 0.04]).

Social connection (b = 0.53, SE = 0.05, t(277) = 8.96, p < .001, 95% CI = [0.41, 0.64]).

Indirect effects

Conversation substantiveness (b = 0.22, SE = 0.07, 95% CI = [0.95, 0.37]).

Perceived motivation (b = -0.02, SE = 0.03, 95% CI = [-0.09, 0.03]).

Social connection (b = 0.03, SE = 0.06, 95% CI = [-0.08, 0.17]).

Conversation substantiveness → Social connection (b = 0.15, SE = 0.04, 95% CI = [0.07, 0.25]).

Perceived motivation → Social connection (b = 0.04, SE = 0.01, 95% CI = [0.009, 0.08]).

Manipulation Texts

<<All Participants>>

Important information: In this study we would like to learn about interpersonal conversation and to test an online chat platform. These days, chat platforms often give people full sentences that they can just select and send to their conversation partner. In this study, you will select and send some sentences to a conversation partner and wait for him/her to write you a response. After that, we will ask you some questions about your conversation with this person. Your conversation

partner is another Mturker who we will connect you with. We gave that person a topic for him/her to tell you about in the conversation.

Please click next for the study to establish a chat connection with the other person. After the conversation we will ask you some questions about it.

—PAGE BREAK—

You are now connected with your conversation partner.

Please click next to see the first pair of sentences you can select from.

You can start the conversation by sending the other Mturker one of the following questions. Select the one you want to send him/her and click next.

- Hi. How are you?

- Hello. How is your day going?

—PAGE BREAK—

<<Response from Teller>>

- Hi! I’m doing fine. Thanks. You knoww, I'm just here on the computer. I guess it's the same for you.

- Hello! The day is going fine. Thanks. You knoww, I'm just here on the computer. I guess it's the same for you.

—PAGE BREAK—

Select your next sentence.

- How long have you done Mturk?

- What are you preferred tasks on Mturk?

—PAGE BREAK—

<<Response from Teller>>

- I have been doing this for a few months. I like it a lot. Of course there are good things and bad things, but for the most part I find Mturk really good. By the way, thanks for asking!

- I have been doing all types. I like it a lot. Of course there are good things and bad things, but for the most part I find Mturk really good. By the way, thanks for asking!

—PAGE BREAK—

- I was told that you had a topic to tell me about? What is it?

- The researchers told me that you were going to tell me about a certain topic? What's that?

—PAGE BREAK—

<<Experiential Condition Text>>

Yes, that's right. They asked me to tell you about a time when I spent money, basically, to have an experience. I can tell you about one purchase I clearly remember. This happened about 7 months ago. I walked into a store at a skiing resort that sells various types of skiing experiences to visitors. You know, in my mind skiing activities are really about having nice winter/outdoor experiences. I ended up purchasing one of the skiing experiences that they offered. What a cool experience! I could tell you the details of that skiing experience, but I guess you can imagine it, right?

<<Material Condition Text>>

Yes, that's right. They asked me to tell you about a time when I spent money, basically, to have an object. I can tell you about one purchase I clearly remember. This happened about 7 months ago. I walked into a store at a skiing resort that sells various types of skiing objects to visitors. You know, in my mind skiing products are really about having nice winter/outdoor objects. I ended up purchasing one of the skiing objects that they offered. What a cool object! I could tell you the details of that skiing object, but I guess you can imagine it, right?

—PAGE BREAK—

- I see. Can you tell me more about it?

- Yes, I can imagine. Would you give more details about it?

—PAGE BREAK—

<<Experiential Condition Text>>

Definitely! That purchase allowed me to have one of the best outdoor experiences I have ever had. It's just the type of thing that you're glad to experience, you know? It's all about having good moments around the experience. That's what matters, isn't it?

Anyway, I liked it a lot. I had lots of great moments there. If you are looking for a great experience in the outdoors, I definitely recommend something like this. It's a wonderful experience to have!

<<Material Condition Text>>

Definitely! That purchase allowed me to have one of the best outdoor objects I have ever had. It's just the type of thing that you're glad to own, you know? It's all about having good features around the equipment. That's what matters, isn't it?

Anyway, I like it a lot. It has lots of great features. If you are looking for a great equipment for the outdoors, I definitely recommend something like this. It's a wonderful object to own!

—PAGE BREAK—

- Got it. Thanks for telling me about it. I wish you a good day.

—END OF THE INTERACTION—

Replication Study 2

This study is a direct replication of Replication Study 1 reported above. However, instead of using a sample of college students, this study recruited from a sample of online participants on Mturk.

Procedures

Four hundred participants from Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk; females = 62%, M_{age} = 38.35, *SD* = 12.35) completed this between-subjects experiment for financial compensation. The study used identical procedures to those of Replication Study 1 reported on the manuscript, except for the necessary modification in the instruction that the participant (i.e., the listener) would be connected to another Mturker (instead of another lab participant, as in Replication Study 1).

Following the conversation interaction, participants answered the same two-item measure of substantiveness (r = .78, p < .001), five-item measure of social connection (α = .92), and four-item measure of listener happiness as in Study 2 (α = .94). Additionally, they answered the six-item measure of perceived motivation and the two-item measure serving as manipulation check (r = .86, p < .001).

Results

Measurement model. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA; AMOS) tested whether the data fit this proposed three-factor model. Results yielded: $\chi^2(33) = 91.74$, p < .001, CMIN/DF = 2.78, RMSEA = .07, NNFI = .98, and CFI = .99, indicating that the measurement model was in line with established parameters of adequate model fit (Bagozzi and Yi 2012). Given the proper fit of the empirical three-factor model, the analyses considered these factors as separate constructs.

Next, using Fornell and Larcker's (1981) criteria, this work examined and found support for convergent and discriminant validity (Table E2).

Table E2. Results from Convergent and Discriminant Validity Analyses—Replication Study 2

Construct	Reliability (α)	AVE	MSV	ASV	SQRT of AVE
Conversation Substantiveness	0.88	0.78	0.63	0.61	0.88
Social Connection	0.92	0.70	0.59	0.59	0.84
Listener Happiness	0.94	0.84	0.63	0.61	0.92

Correlation Matrix—Replication Study 2.

		Correlations		
Labels	Variables	M1	M2	Y
M1	Substantive Conversation	--		
M2	Social Connection	.766	--	
Y	Listener Happiness	.791	.769	--

Manipulation check. An ANOVA testing whether the manipulation had the intended effect showed that experiential condition participants thought of the conversation as significantly more experiential (M = 6.34, SD = 0.99) than material condition participants (M = 2.54, SD = 1.72; $F(1, 398) = 725.83$, $p < .001$, Cohen's d = 2.70), supporting the purpose of the manipulation.

Listener happiness. Results showed that listeners gained significantly more happiness from conversations about skiing experience (M = 4.14, SD = 1.57) than skiing objects (M = 3.24, SD = 1.49; $F(1, 398) = 34.41$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.58$).[4]

Two-step sequential mediation. The indirect effect of conversation topic on listener happiness was significant via both paths: 'conversation substantiveness → social connection' (two-step sequential mediation: β = 0.13, SE = 0.04, 95% CI = [0.04, 0.23]), supporting Hypothesis 2; and 'perceived motivation → social connection' (two-step sequential mediation: β = 0.03, SE = 0.01, 95% CI = [0.01, 0.07]), replicating Van Boven, Campbell, and Gilovich (2010). An additional contrast analysis indicated the neither path transmits a significantly greater proportion of the indirect effect (β = 0.09, SE = 0.05, 95% CI = [-0.0003, 0.19]). Since this analysis (PROCESS, model 80) considers the effect of each indirect path while controlling for the effect of the other, these findings suggest that each of the two step 1 mediators (i.e., conversation substantiveness and perceived motivation) makes a meaningful contribution to explaining the effect on the outcome variable, above and beyond the variance explained by the other path.

Discussion

Using the same approach as Replication Study 1, this study replicates all results with an online sample.

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[4]Results with 3-item measure of listener happiness.
Listener happiness: Listeners reported gaining significantly more happiness from conversations about experiential than material purchases (Mexp = 4.04, SD = 1.60 vs. Mobj = 3.28, SD = 1.53; $F(1, 398) = 23.69$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.48$).
Two-step sequential mediation. The indirect effect of conversation topic on listener happiness was significant via both paths: 'substantiveness → social connection' (two-step sequential mediation: β = 0.14, SE = 0.05, 95% CI = [0.04, 0.25]), supporting Hypothesis 2; and 'perceived motivation → social connection' (two-step sequential mediation: β = 0.04, SE = 0.01, 95% CI = [0.01, 0.07]), replicating Van Boven, Campbell, and Gilovich (2010. An additional contrast analysis provided no evidence that either path transmits a significantly greater proportion of the indirect effect (β = 0.10, SE = 0.05, 95% CI = [-0.0025, 0.21]).

Reporting of All Paths Forming the Sequential Mediation

This section documents the results for all links of the two-step sequential mediation analysis.

Outcome variable: Conversation Substantiveness

Experiential versus material conversation (b = 0.48, SE = 0.16, t(398) = 2.90, p = .003, 95% CI = [0.15, 0.81]).

Outcome variable: Perceived motivation

Experiential versus material conversation (b = 0.79, SE = 0.16, t(398) = 4.83, p < .001, 95% CI = [0.47, 1.12]).

Outcome variable: Social connection

Experiential versus material conversation (b = -0.05, SE = 0.09, t(396) = -0.59, p = .55, 95% CI = [-0.24, 0.13]).

Conversation substantiveness (b = 0.65, SE = 0.02, t(396) = 23.31, p < .001, 95% CI = [0.59, 0.70]).

Perceived motivation (b = 0.11, SE = 0.02, t(396) = 4.11, p < .001, 95% CI = [0.06, 0.17]).

Outcome variable: Listener happiness

Experiential versus material conversation (b = 0.52, SE = 0.08, t(395) = 5.89, p < .001, 95% CI = [0.34, 0.69]).

Conversation substantiveness (b = 0.44, SE = 0.03, t(395) = 11.26, p < .001, 95% CI = [0.36, 0.52]).

Perceived motivation (b = 0.02, SE = 0.02, t(395) = 0.76, p = .44, 95% CI = [-0.03, 0.07]).

Social connection (b = 0.41, SE = 0.04, t(395) = 9.08 p < .001, 95% CI = [0.32, 0.50]).

Indirect effects

Conversation substantiveness (b = 0.21, SE = 0.07, 95% CI = [0.06, 0.37]).

Perceived motivation (*b* = 0.10, *SE* = 0.02, 95% CI = [-0.03, 0.07]).

Social connection (*b* = -0.02, *SE* = 0.03, 95% CI = [-0.09, 0.06]).

Conversation substantiveness → Social connection (*b* = 0.13, *SE* = 0.04, 95% CI = [0.04, 0.23]).

Perceived motivations → Social connection (*b* = 0.03, *SE* = 0.01, 95% CI = [0.01, 0.07]).

Replication Study 3

This study employs a recall procedure to test the replicability of experiential conversations' greater ability to advance listener happiness and examine whether the sequential mechanism via conversation substantiveness and social connection explains this effect.

Procedures

Sixty one participants from MTurk (females = 57%, M_{age} = 37.33, SD = 12.31) completed the experiment for financial compensation. Participants were randomly assigned to recall a conversation in which they had listened to someone talk about either experiences or objects. Participants then wrote what the other person had shared with them during this conversation (please see the end of this study for the complete manipulation texts).

Next, participants completed the same measure of conversation substantiveness, (r = .58), social connection (α = .91), and listener happiness (α = .97). This study did not assess perceived motivation. Last, they reported on materialism by using the MVS measure (Richins 2004).

The recall approach in this study renders it susceptible to an important confound. Namely, contrary to the argument that the stronger social connections between experiential (vs. material) conversation partners emerge from the conversation itself, one could contend that these bonds actually predated the conversation. This could happen for example because experiences are more central to the self than objects, they are more personal (Carter and Gilovich 2012), and people may choose to talk about their experiences (vs. objects) with individuals with whom they already have a close relationship. Thus, experiential listeners may have been more likely than material listeners to recall a conversation with a close friend. To rule out this potential confound, participants in this study answered the question: "Before having that conversation with this person, how well acquainted were you with him/her?" (1 = *Not at all*; 7 = *Very Much*).

Results

Measurement model. Results from the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA; AMOS) yielded: $\chi^2(39) = 61.82$, $p = .01$, CMIN/DF = 1.58, RMSEA = .09, NNFI = .95, and CFI = .97, indicating that the measurement model was in line with established parameters of adequate model fit (Bagozzi & Yi, 2012). Given the proper fit of the empirical three-factor model, the analyses considered these factors as separate constructs.

Using the Fornell and Larcker's (1981) to test the convergent and discriminant validity of the three constructs, this work obtains the following results, which strongly support both validities (Table E3).

Table E3: Results from Convergent and Discriminant Validity Analyses—Replication Study 3

Construct	Reliability (α)	AVE	MSV	ASV	SQRT of AVE
Conversation Substantiveness	0.72	0.61	0.43	0.40	0.78
Social Connection	0.91	0.71	0.43	0.41	0.84
Listener Happiness	0.97	0.90	0.39	0.38	0.94

Correlation Matrix—Replication Study 3.

		Correlations		
Labels	Variables	M1	M2	Y
M1	Substantive Conversation	--		
M2	Social Connection	.652	--	
Y	Listener Happiness	.606	.627	--

***Listener happiness*.** Results showed that participants who recalled an experiential conversation reported gaining significantly more happiness from the interaction (M = 4.94, SD = 1.86) than did participants who recalled a material conversation (M = 3.62, SD = 1.89; $F(1, 59)$ = 7.38, p = .009, Cohen's d = 0.70).[5]

Mediation. A test of sequential mediation (PROCESS, model 6) showed that, first, conversation topic (0 = material; 1 = experiential) predicted conversation substantiveness (b = 1.48, SE = 0.32, $t(59)$ = 4.51, $p < .001$). Second, conversation substantiveness predicted social connection (b = 0.62, SE = 0.11, $t(58)$ = 5.41, $p < .001$) but conversation topic did not (b = 0.16, SE = 0.33, $t(58)$ = 0.47, p = .63). Third, both conversation substantiveness (b = 0.45, SE = 0.18, $t(57)$ = 2.42, p = .01) and social connection predicted listener happiness (b = 0.54, SE = 0.17, $t(57)$ = 3.12, p = .002), but conversation topic no longer predicted happiness when the two mediators were in the model (b = 0.05, SE = 0.44, $t(57)$ = 0.12, p = .90). As expected, the sequential indirect effect of conversation topic on happiness via conversation substantiveness and social connection was significant (b = 0.50, SE = 0.22, 95% CI = [0.16, 1.05]).

Materialism (MVS), age, and gender did not differ between the two experimental conditions nor did they qualify the direct effect of conversation topic on listener happiness (ps > .1) or its indirect effect via conversation substantiveness and social connection. In addition, results showed no differences in pre-existing social connections by condition (M_{exp} = 5.93, SD = 1.73 vs. M_{mat} = 5.68, SD = 1.45, p = .54), assuaging the possible concern that the effects were driven by differing levels of social connections predating the conversation.

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[5] Results with 3-item measure of listener happiness.
Listener happiness: Listeners reported gaining significantly more happiness from conversations about experiential than material purchases (Mexp = 5.00, SD = 1.87 vs. Mobj = 3.59, SD = 1.93; $F(1, 59)$ = 8.14, p = .006, Cohen's d = 0.74).
Two-step sequential mediation. Results show that conversation substantiveness and social connection sequentially mediate the effect of conversation topic on listener happiness: β = 0.51, SE = 0.22, 95% CI = [0.15, 1.03]).

Discussion

Using a different approach to those used in the manuscript (a recall-based approach), this study replicates the finding that listeners perceive conversations centered on experiential (vs. material) purchases as more substantive, leading to stronger social bonds, and greater listener happiness.

Manipulation Texts

Manipulation of Conversation Topic (Material)

Please recall a conversation you had with somebody and that person spent some time telling you about objects s/he owns. In other words, the focus of your conversation was that person's objects. Examples of objects are furniture, jewelry, various types of electronic gadgets, and clothes.

Please write, in some detail, what the person shared with you about his/her objects.

Manipulation of Conversation Topic (Experiential)

Please recall a conversation you had with somebody and that person spent some time telling you about experiences s/he's had. In other words, the focus of your conversation was that person's experiences. Examples of experiences are music concerts, theater performances, meals at restaurants, and vacations.

Please write, in some detail, what the person shared with you about his/her experiences.

Replication Study 4

Using a framing approach similar to that in Study 2 reported in the manuscript, this study tests the replicability of the findings.

Procedures

One hundred participants were recruited from MTurk to complete the study for financial compensation (females = 42%, M_{age} = 37.43, *SD* = 13.57). First, participants were informed that the researchers were interested in learning about conversations between people. They were told that the researchers had asked another MTurk person to recall four instances in which s/he had spent money either to acquire or to do something, and to select one of these four purchases to write about as if s/he were sharing about it with someone in an actual conversation. Participants were instructed to read that person's text as if they were actually having a conversation with the other person and were listening to her/him share. Next, participants were presented with a text focusing on either the experiential or material properties of a BBQ grill (for the complete study texts, please see the end of this study). To increase participant engagement with the task, after this reading part, the questionnaire asked them to write what they thought the rest of the conversation would be like.

Next, participants completed the same measures of conversation substantiveness (*r* = .81), social connection (α = .95), and happiness (α = .96). This study did not assess perceived motivation. To address additional potential concerns about differences in experiential versus material purchases, the questionnaire also measured, on 7-point scales (1 = *Strongly Disagree*; 7 = *Strongly Agree*), how interesting the conversation was ("Hearing about this experience/object was interesting.") and how complex each purchase was perceived to be (three-items; e.g., "This experience/object is complex."; α = .90). Last, participants completed a two-item measure

serving as manipulation check ("This person talked mostly about:"; 1 = *Intangible properties of the grill*; 7 = *Tangible properties of the grill*; "The message focused mainly on the physical aspects of the BBQ grill itself:"; 1 = *Strongly Disagree*; 7 = *Strongly Agree*; r = .76).

Results

Measurement model. Results from the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA; AMOS) yielded: $\chi^2(33) = 53.07$, $p = .01$, CMIN/DF = 1.60, RMSEA = .08, NNFI = .98, and CFI = .99, indicating that the measurement model was in line with established parameters of adequate model fit (Bagozzi & Yi, 2012). Given the proper fit of the empirical three-factor model, the analyses considered these factors as separate constructs.

Using the Fornell and Larcker's (1981) to test the convergent and discriminant validity of the three constructs, this work obtains the following results, which strongly support both validities (Table E4).

Table E4: Results from Convergent and Discriminant Validity Analyses—Replication Study 4.

Construct	Reliability (α)	AVE	MSV	ASV	SQRT of AVE
Conversation Substantiveness	0.90	0.82	0.72	0.70	0.90
Social Connection	0.95	0.65	0.72	0.67	0.81
Listener Happiness	0.96	0.89	0.68	0.65	0.94

Correlation Matrix—Replication Study 4.

Labels	Variables	Correlations		
		M1	M2	Y
M1	Substantive Conversation	--		
M2	Social Connection	.848	--	
Y	Listener Happiness	.824	.790	--

Manipulation check. The framing manipulation worked as expected: material condition participants thought of the conversation as more material (M = 3.92, SD = 1.88) than experiential condition participants (M = 2.62, SD = 1.51; $F(1, 98) = 14.45$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.76$).

Listener happiness. Results from an ANOVA indicated that listeners gained more happiness from conversations focusing on the experiential (M = 4.04, SD = 1.77) rather than the material properties of the grill (M = 3.31, SD = 1.79, $F(1, 98) = 4.22$, $p = .04$, Cohen's $d = 0.41$).[6]

Mediation. An analysis of sequential mediation (PROCESS, model 6) demonstrated that, first, conversation topic (0 = material; 1 = experiential) marginally influenced substantiveness (b = 0.65, SE = 0.35, $t(98) = 1.82$, $p = .07$). Second, substantiveness significantly influenced social connection (b = 0.80, SE = 0.05, $t(97) = 15.40$, $p < .001$) but conversation topic did not (b = 0.22, SE = 0.18, $t(97) = 1.21$, $p = .22$). Third, substantiveness (b = 0.55, SE = 0.10, $t(96) = 5.26$, $p <$ .001) and social connection significantly influenced listener happiness (b = 0.33, SE = 0.11, $t(96)$ = 3.04, $p = .003$). In this model, conversation topic no longer predicted listener happiness

[6] Results with 3-item measure of listener happiness.
Listener happiness: Listeners reported gaining significantly more happiness from conversations about experiential than material purchases (Mexp = 3.95, SD = 1.83 vs. Mobj = 3.18, SD = 1.79; $F(1, 98) = 4.46$, $p = .03$, Cohen's $d = 0.42$).
Two-step sequential mediation. Results show that conversation substantiveness and social connection sequentially mediate the effect of conversation topic on listener happiness: β = 0.20, SE = 0.14, 95% CI = [0.002, 0.58]).

significantly (b = 0.12, SE = 0.20, t(96) = 0.61, p = .53). In line with these results, there was a significant sequential indirect effect of conversation topic on listener happiness via conversation substantiveness and social connection (b = 0.17, SE = 0.12, 95% CI = [0.0007, 0.52]).

Additional analyses. Perceptions of interestingness and purchase complexity did not differ between the two experimental conditions nor did they qualify the direct effect of conversation topic on listener happiness (ps > .1) or its indirect effect via conversation substantiveness and social connection.[7]

Discussion

This study shows that listeners derive more happiness from a purchase-related conversation when the experiential aspects of the purchase take central stage than when its material aspects predominate. Further, and replicating Study 2 reported in the manuscript, this study confirms that this difference is driven by listeners' perception that experiential (vs. material) conversations are more substantive, which makes these conversations especially conducive to social bonding.

Manipulation Texts

Initial Instructions to All Participants

Read this carefully:

In this study we are interested in learning about conversations between people. So, here is what we've done:

[7] Participants in the experiential and material framing conditions used statistically indistinguishable numbers of words to describe the imagined part of the conversation (Mexp = 44.96, SD = 22.26 vs. Mmat = 43.04, SD = 22.53, t(98) = 0.42, p = .66, 95% CI = [-6.96, 10.80]).

We have asked another Mturk person to list four recent instances in which s/he spent money to acquire or do something. Then, we asked this person to select one of the four purchases s/he would want to tell others about. In other words, s/he was the ultimate decider of which purchase s/he would share about with you. Finally, we instructed this person to share about the purchase as if s/he were in an actual conversation.

Your Task:

We would like you to read on the next page what this person shared and imagine that you're actually having a conversation with this person and listening to her/him share. After that, we will ask you some questions about the interaction.

Manipulation of BBQ Grill (Material)

Below is what the other person shared about their object. After reading their story below, use the space below to write what you think the rest of the conversation would be like.

So, let me tell you about a nice BBQ object. A while back I got this BBQ grill. Because grills are something people keep for some time, my goal is that, during the time I own the grill, I like the object itself. If you have some time I want to tell you about the characteristics of the object and what it is like to have this object. You know, in my mind, the grill is really about having nice objects at my house...

Manipulation of BBQ Grill (Experiential)

Below is what the other person shared about their experience. After reading their story below, use the space below to write what you think the rest of the conversation would be like.

So, let me tell you about a nice BBQ experience. A while back I got this BBQ grill. Because grills are something people use for some time, my goal is that, during the time I use the grill, I like the experience of using it. If you have some time I want to tell you about the characteristics of the experience and what it is like to have this experience. You know, in my mind, the grill is really about having nice experiences at my house...

Replication Study 5

This study retests the model with a different measure of social connection that has already been employed in the marketing literature.

Procedures

One hundred and fifty MTurk participants completed the study for financial compensation (females = 71%, M_{age} = 41.02, *SD* = 13.33). The study employed a between-subjects design where, similar to Study 3 reported in the manuscript, participants were asked to imagine joining a social organization of their choice and having a conversation with another member who shares about either an experiential or a material purchase. Using a fill-in-the-blank procedure also similar to that in Study 3, participants completed the sentences: "The experience/object the other person told me about was a(an) ____" and "To be more specific, when sharing details of that experience/object, they told me that the experience/objects was ____."

Next, participants completed the same measures of listener happiness (α = .97) and substantiveness (*r* = .66, *p* < .001), and reported on social connection using a three-item measure previously employed in the literature ("I liked the other person."; "I felt connected to the other person."; "I felt chemistry with that person."; Umashankar, Ward, and Dahl 2017; α = .91).

Results

Measurement model. Results from the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA; AMOS) yielded: $\chi^2(24) = 45.90$, *p* = .005, CMIN/DF = 1.91, RMSEA = .08, NNFI = .98, and CFI = .99, indicating that the measurement model was in line with established parameters of adequate model fit (Bagozzi & Yi, 2012). Given the proper fit of the empirical three-factor model, the analyses considered these factors as separate constructs.

Using the Fornell and Larcker's (1981) to test the convergent and discriminant validity of the three constructs, this work obtains the following results, which provide appropriate support for both validities (Table E5).

Table E5: Results from Convergent and Discriminant Validity Analyses—Replication Study 5

Construct	Reliability (α)	AVE	MSV	ASV	SQRT of AVE
Conversation Substantiveness	.79	.66	.55	.54	.81
Social Connection	.91	.46	.53	.53	.68
Listener Happiness	.97	.89	.55	.54	.94

Correlation Matrix—Replication Study 5.

		Correlations		
Labels	Variables	M1	M2	Y
M1	Substantive Conversation	--		
M2	Social Connection	.73	--	
Y	Listener Happiness	.74	.73	--

Listener happiness. Listeners gained more happiness from experiential (M = 5.07, SD = 1.50) than material conversations (M = 4.13, SD = 1.72, $F(1, 148) = 12.66$, $p = .001$, Cohen's d = 0.58), supporting Hypothesis 1.

Two-step sequential mediation. An analysis of sequential mediation (PROCESS, model 6) showed that, first, conversation topic (0 = material; 1 = experiential) significantly influenced substantiveness (b = 0.66, SE = 0.22, $t(148) = 2.80$, $p = .003$). Second, substantiveness significantly influenced social connection (b = 0.66, SE = 0.05, $t(147) = 12.32$, $p < .001$) but conversation topic had only a marginal influence (b = 0.28, SE = 0.14, $t(147) = 1.87$, $p = .06$).

Third, substantiveness (b = 0.51, SE = 0.08, t(146) = 5.85, p < .001) and social connection significantly influenced listener happiness (b = 0.52, SE = 0.09, t(146) = 5.50, p < .001). In this model, conversation topic no longer predicted listener happiness significantly (b = 0.22, SE = 0.17, t(146) = 1.28, p = .10). In line with these results, and supporting Hypothesis 2, there was a significant sequential indirect effect of conversation topic on listener happiness via conversation substantiveness and social connection (b = 0.22, SE = 0.08, 95% CI = [0.07, 0.42]).

Discussion

This study offers replication evidence that listeners derive more happiness from conversations about an experiential (vs. material) purchase. Importantly, using a different measure of social connection that had already been employed in the marketing literature, this study also replicates the explaining mechanism: conversation substantiveness → social connection. These results help establish the robustness of the findings reported in the manuscript.

Web Appendix F – Single-Paper Meta-Analysis

This single-paper meta-analysis (SPMA; McShane and Böckenholt 2017) provides a synthesized view of the effect of conversation topic on listener happiness as captured by Studies 1-3* reported in the manuscript and replication Studies 1-5 reported in Web Appendix E.

Across these eight studies, conversation topic (experiential vs. material purchase) had a significant impact on listener happiness. An SPMA of these data estimated the effect at .79 (95% CI = [0.64, 0.95]), indicating that listeners of a purchase-related conversation gain more happiness from the interaction when it revolves around an experience than an object. I^2 was estimated at 90.17% (95% CI = [85.49, 93.34]), suggesting that heterogeneity high, with method factors accounting for a moderate variation in the observed effect beyond that attributable to the experimental treatment. This is expected given that the studies employed different manipulation procedures among considerably distinct sample populations (McShane & Böckenholt, 2017). The visual convergence of effects demonstrated in Figure F1 is particularly encouraging, as it indicates the robustness and generalizability of the findings.

FIGURE F1

Meta-Analysis Results

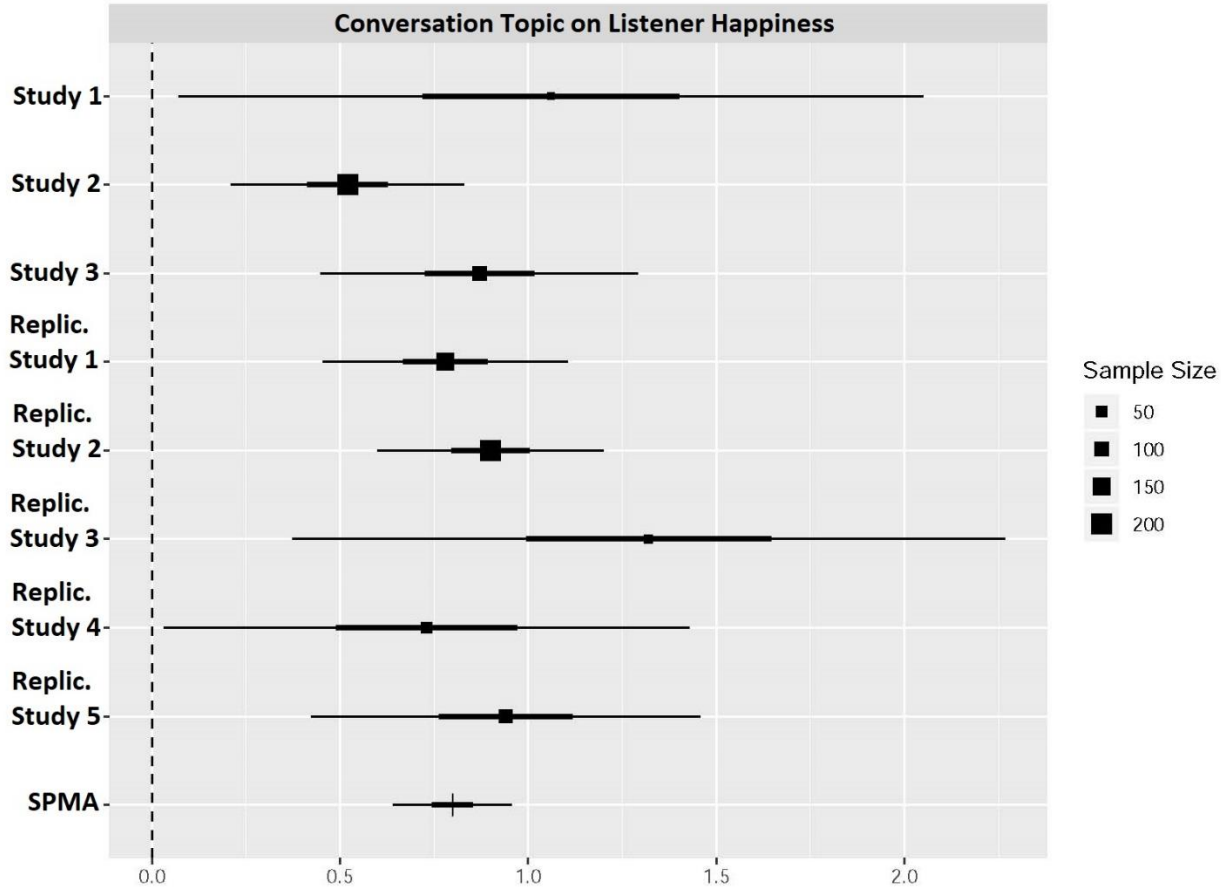

TABLE F1

Statistics from the 7 Studies Used in the SPMA

Conversation Topic	Experiential			Material		
Study	*M*	*SD*	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*N*
Study 1	4.65	1.66	20	3.59	1.41	17
Study 2	4.23	1.52	200	3.71	1.65	202
Study 3*	5.31	1.22	94	4.44	1.59	83
Replication Study 1	4.03	1.34	144	3.25	1.44	138
Replication Study 2	4.14	1.57	200	3.24	1.49	200
Replication Study 3	4.94	1.86	27	3.62	1.89	34
Replication Study 4	4.04	1.77	50	3.31	1.79	50
Replication Study 5	5.07	1.50	76	4.13	1.72	74

*Positive valence condition only.

SPM Tool Used for This Analysis: https://blakemcshane.shinyapps.io/spmeta/ (McShane & Böckenholt, 2017)

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Table 1. Results from Convergent and Discriminant Validity Analyses—Study 2

Construct	Reliability (α)	AVE	MSV	ASV	SQRT of AVE
Conversation Substantiveness	0.87	0.76	0.66	0.64	0.87
Social Connection	0.93	0.74	0.66	0.66	0.86
Listener Happiness	0.94	0.82	0.66	0.63	0.90